

Bible Journal 2019

January 1, 2019 Genesis 1-3

In the beginning- God! The Scriptures begin with this bold statement....the God we worship, love and serve created OUR beginning- He does not have a “beginning” or “end” since He is outside time. As I wrestle with the passages in Genesis 1- I wonder always the “why?”. Why was the universe even created, and more importantly (to me), why was mankind (and to me more importantly- I) created? There is a tradition in some churches that I wish I had experienced as a child- the Catechism. The Westminster Short Catechism is an example:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

Q. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

A. The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catechism>)

God insists on being “in the beginning”. My challenge is to put Him at the beginning- at the center of everything, on the throne of MY heart, and at the beginning of each day!

A key verse in Genesis 1 is verse 26 *“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* (NASB) The Godhead is present in this verse, illustrating a key doctrine of the co-eternal Holy Spirit and Christ (let US!). The following verse also clarifies the muddy, gender confused state we find ourselves in today, where a child (or adult!) “identifies” themselves as male or female, and by inference declares that God the Creator “made a mistake” in assigning their gender- verse 27 confidently states: *“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* (NASB) Furthermore we see in this verse that we are stamped in the very image of God- we are “image bearers” as Joe Peabody Jr. often preached to us. Even though we are sometimes confused, misdirected, and stubbornly sinful, we are in our essence bearers of God’s own image!

It is interesting side note (and perhaps the subject of a trivia question) that God gave us a vegetarian diet in verse 29 : *“Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you;”* and that this diet prescription also applied to the animals in verse 30 : *“and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the [ap]sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so.”*

Chapter 1 ends with a statement that everything created in these 6 days is “good”. This does not, however, suggest that we should worship the earth, either as pagans, where earth worship is an old tradition, or the modern environmentalist who actually believes that man is a stain on the earth and that the earth would greatly benefit from man’s extinction! (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rCT4gieqjs>) The creation is “good” simply because it was created by a God who is good...and who stamped His image on us!

Bible scholars tell us that an “alternate” creation story begins in Chapter 2, verse 4. The distinction is made on the basis of stylistic differences (such as word choice and arrangements), as well as the word used in reference to God. Genesis 1 uses the Hebrew word “Elohim” (the “powerful one”), and 2 the word “YHWH Elohim” (the “Lord God”), and in the differences between a “cosmocentric” (earth centered-cosmos centered) description in Genesis 1 and an “anthropocentric” (man centered) creation story in Genesis 2. The order of creation is presented slightly differently (<https://www.compellingtruth.org/two-creation-accounts.html>). The resolution of these apparent contradictions follows the “both and” method. Both accounts are true and reliable, they simply reflect the storytelling style of different authors. Both are true, they simply report the story from two different viewpoints.

In genesis 2:9 we see the hint of the conflict that is to come- the persons that God created will be faced with a choice of obedience or disobedience- the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil play a key role in this unfolding drama: *“Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”* (Genesis 2:9 NASB). What was man’s job/occupation to be? – a gardener in the unimaginably fertile garden God had created, and as a “namer” of the animals. The Hebrew concept of names included a description of the characteristics and personality of the one named. Thus God allowed man to participate in the unfolding creation by assigning names: *“Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.”* (Genesis 2:19-20 NASB).

God, always the perfect Provider, then created woman (Eve in Hebrew means “living”) from the man’s side to be a co-equal helpmate for him. The first family was then established, with the physical joining of a man and woman. God’s pattern was (and is) very clear! *“The man said,*

“This is now bone of my bones,

And flesh of my flesh;

She shall be called Woman,

Because she was taken out of Man.”

24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:23-25 NASB)

Two chapters! That’s how long the perfect creation and sinless human race lasted! Chapter 3 is key to understanding all the Scripture, for it deals with the “fall” of man. The ability to choose right and wrong, good and evil, obedience and disobedience were “baked in” to the created human. This was essential if we were to freely CHOOSE to worship, fellowship with, and obey God. Obedience means little if there is no choice! The serpent, who many believe was in a different physical form before the fall, was the agent used to raise the question of obedience and authority. Should man decide to rule himself, or should he gratefully and obediently let God rule? Do we wish to run our own lives, or is God on the throne of our lives? Eve faced the choice first...and took of the fruit. *“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6 NASB)* Now that the sinful choice was made, God did not wish for the first two created to eat of the Tree of Life: *“Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.” (Genesis 3:22-23 NASB)*

The consequences of this sin were immediate and profound- we human beings tried to shift the blame for our sin and place it on the serpent (Eve) or the woman (Adam). The serpent changed both form and function, man would now sweat to cultivate the soil, and his wife would experience pain in childbirth. The stain of sin was immediate and profound. Not until the end of time as described in the Revelation will there be a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:1)

January 2, 2019 Genesis 4-6

The first dysfunctional family? Murder rears its ugly head in the story of the anger and ultimately taking the life of a brother in Genesis 4. We read: *“Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” 8 Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” (Gen 4:6-8 NASB)* A very telling exchange then occurs between God and Cain- certainly God knew (and had seen) the act of murder- yet He calls out to Cain to “claim” his sin- the ultimate purpose of God seems to be to reclaim and redeem Cain, for God still provides protection for Cain and his family: *“Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to*

you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.” Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” So the Lord said to him, “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.” And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.” (Genesis 4:9-16)

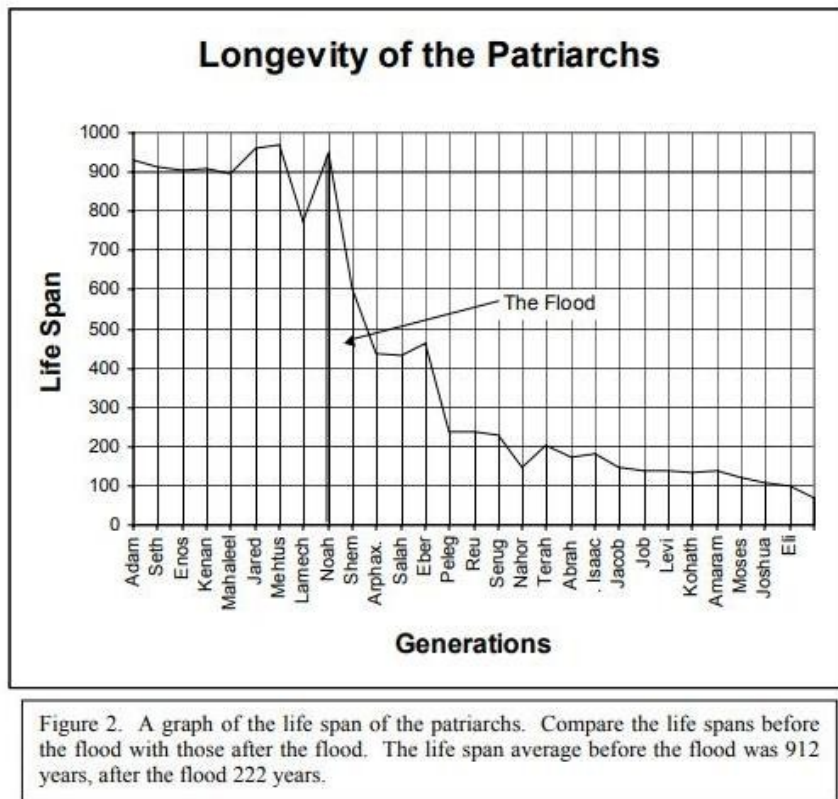
In verse 25 we see that Adam and Eve produce another son, Seth, to join their family in the place of the slain son and brother Abel: *“Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, “God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him.” To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord.”* (Genesis 4:25-26 NASB) And so, worship began among God’s created people!

The amazing length of life in the antediluvian (before the flood) period has been the subject of both wonder and controversy. The Scripture plainly states that not only did Adam father a child Seth at age 130, but lives to be the age of 930. *“When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. Then the days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.”* (Genesis 5:3-5 NASB) Some commentary points to the favorable climate and diet prevalent at the time

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/genesis/genesis-5.html>) or the protection of atmospheric water from UV radiation

(<http://www.biblestudy.org/maps/life-span-of-patriarchs-from-adam-to-noah.html>) A longer treatise suggests other possible factors

(http://www.amendez.com/NAES/Noahs_Ark_Articles_files/NAS%20The%20Scientific%20Evidence%20for%20Biblical%20Longevity.pdf) with the accompanying chart:



The authors speculate that the recorded ages in Genesis and beyond fit the curve for natural decay, which includes radioactive decay. However one interprets this seeming anomaly, the translation uses the word “year”- which in biblical times was 12 lunar months- about 354 days. Perhaps this is an issue we should ask the Creator when we reach heaven...? Simply stated, for reasons that we do not (and may not ever) completely understand, the pre-flood patriarchs seemed to live significantly longer than we do.

In Genesis 6 we encounter another mystery- the “sons of God” (Genesis 6:2) and “Nephilim” (Genesis 6:4). The Scripture states: *“Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.”* (Genesis 6:4b NASB) Certainly this is another biblical mystery (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nephilim>) The word Nephilim also occurs in Ezekiel 32:27, and is translated “fallen”. The painter Hieronymus Bosch depicted these “Nephilim” as fallen angels, perhaps those that fell to earth when Satan/Lucifer was cast out of heaven.

The Fall of the Rebel Angels by [Hieronymus Bosch](#) is based on [Genesis 6:1-4](#)

The results of widespread sin made God sorrowful that He had created mankind, and He decided to “reset” by destroying mankind....fortunately for us, there was a “faithful remnant” in the person of Noah! *“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”* (Genesis 6:5-8) Noah was far from perfect, as we will see later in his story in Genesis, but loved God and proved to be an obedient servant.

In the midst of this great destruction, God was loving and His kindness gave rise to a covenant promise between Himself and mankind: *“Then God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and*

out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you.” (Genesis 6:13-18 NASB)

Noah believed, and acted, and God created and kept an eternally binding covenant with Noah and his descendants: *“Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.”* (Genesis 6:22 NASB). The yielded spirit of Noah was recognized and blessed by God- a wonderful example to us of the fruits of an obedient spirit and servant attitude!

(<https://www.ourdailyjourney.org/2014/11/16/belief-and-obedience/>)

January 3, 2019 Genesis 6-9

We need direction...always...whether we realize it or not- and God graciously gave Noah directions for filling the ark with its precious cargo. Not only Noah's family but also representative male/female pairs of animals were to be gathered into the ark. The “clean” animals were to be taken by sevens. It is not clear if there were seven or seven pairs. How did Noah know which animals were clean, since the Law had not been given. One possible answer comes from the very helpful website “Got Questions?”: “Leviticus 11 defines the difference between clean and unclean animals, but Noah lived before the giving of the Law. We are not told how Noah knew which animals were clean and unclean, but he obviously knew the difference. Sacrifices to God were made before the Mosaic Law (Genesis 4:4), which means God had somehow communicated to man what animals were suitable for sacrifice (and, later, for eating).” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/animals-clean-unclean.html>). The Scripture records the filling of the ark before the 40 day rain: *“Now Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth. Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood. Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground, there went into the ark to Noah by twos, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. It came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. The rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.”* (Genesis 7:6-12 NASB) Several things to note- 1) Noah was 600 years old!; 2) the fountains of the great deep AND the sky were opened. Until this time the earth was watered from underground: *“Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.”* (Genesis 2:5-6 NASB)

The number 40 appears several places in Scripture. According to a helpful reference:

(<http://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/40.html>), the number 40 signifies a time of testing, trial or probation. Certainly the 40 days of rain would be a time of testing for the folks on board the ark, teeming with animals to be cared for. The period of testing went far past 40 days- the Bible tells us that the period of the flood and its aftermath was very long: *"The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days."* (Genesis 7:24 NASB) Noah must have, as we would, wonder what the purpose of this long time of testing was. Certainly the obvious "reset" of the earth and all its inhabitants, man and animal, was a primary purpose of this time. I have often wondered if God was teaching Noah patience...to "wait upon the Lord" (Psalm 27:14; Exodus 14:14; Isaiah 30:18; Isaiah 40:31)

"And God remembered Noah..." (Genesis 8:1). How often do we wonder if somehow the Lord has forgotten us, or worse still, forsaken us? Noah certainly learned patience as the flood slowly receded. Knowing little of high technology, but lots about the roosting behavior of birds, Noah first sent out a raven and then two doves to see if the land had dried sufficiently for habitation: *"Then it came about at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; and he sent out a raven, and it flew here and there until the water was dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark, for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself. So he waited yet another seven days; and again he sent out the dove from the ark. The dove came to him toward evening, and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. Then he waited yet another seven days, and sent out the dove; but she did not return to him again."* (Genesis 8:6-12 NASB).

The earth was reset and reborn. God made sure that His people knew clearly that they were to be fruitful and multiply, echoing His words to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28): *"Then God spoke to Noah, saying, 'Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.'" So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark.*

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.' (Genesis 8:15-21). All was well- the earth was restored- the beginnings of repopulation were realized, and Noah worshiped God...what could go wrong? As we see in the next chapter, Noah was still a fallible human, carrying the stain of sin despite his righteousness.

God established an everlasting covenant with mankind, putting a rainbow in the sky as a reminder of His faithfulness. As the spiritual says "No more water, but fire next time!" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_y2hFjoyrU). The God told Noah that "everything that moves on the earth would be suitable for food, an apparent contradiction to the distinction made later in the Law about dietary practice (see <https://www.shalomadventure.com/torah/articles/833-1>). Furthermore, the life of something- its very blood" was not to be eaten or consumed: *"Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man.*

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

"As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it." (Genesis 9:3-7)

It is important to realize that God made (initiated) the covenant, and that He alone was trustworthy enough to keep this covenant! As we see later in God's covenant with Abraham, God is the primary covenant maker and keeper (Genesis 15, 17).

And Noah, who was apparently a farmer by trade, grew grapes, made wine, and then proceeded to become drunk on the wine he had made! From this unbecoming scene, Ham, son of Canaan was cursed because of his father Ham viewing Noah's nakedness. These three sons were to be the father of three great tribes of people- the Shemites (Semites), Japhedites (Mostly the Europeans and their descendants) and Hamites (Cannanites). It is puzzling why Canaan, the son of Ham, would be punished for his father Ham's "sin"

(https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_747.cfm). However, the central message to me is that one (Noah) who could be so faithful and righteous as to be picked by God Himself to carry on the human race, and whose first act on surviving the flood was to build an altar and worship, could fall into the sin of drunkenness. This should be a touchstone and lesson to us all as to the "filthy rags" that are our righteousness (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:10) The Scripture says: *"Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him. So he said,*

"Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed be the Lord, The God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant. "May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant."

Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.” (Genesis 9:20-29 NASB)

Noah lives 950 years, almost as long as the oldest recorded human (969) (see: <https://www.gotquestions.org/oldest-man-in-the-Bible.html>)!

January 4, 2019 Genesis 10-12

Certainly there is controversy over the generations of Noah (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generations_of_Noah) since the Hamites are described as “servants”. Clearly this is unpalatable to modern readers, where the concept of a permanent servant class is repugnant at best. (<http://www.africaspeaks.com/reasoning/index.php?topic=1059.0;wap2>). Certainly God is not blessing racism (<http://www.harvestbiblechurch.net/blog/curse-of-the-canaanites>). The genealogy of the three “nations” listed in Genesis 10 does not offer a clear answer to the distinction God has made. Perhaps the easiest resolution of this dilemma is to realize that the descendants of Canaan (Biblical “Canaanites”) were not the persons of color, but were the “Canaanites” that so plagued the Hebrew people later in history (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-9/>)

Two major themes and events unfold in Genesis 11. Mankind decides to “be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14 and Ezekiel 28:12-19)- to be his own God, and build a tower- symbolically acquiring equal status with God. The ancients also believed in “strength in numbers”- if they were all gathered in one place- in this case, Shinar- they would acquire power equal to God. Had they forgotten God’s mighty flood that erased mankind from the earth?

In order to thwart this plan, God causes the peoples, who were of one language, to speak many languages. The resulting confusion halts the ill-advised project. The Scripture records the event this way: *“Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:1-9)*

So mankind’s efforts were overcome- as they always are- by the One righteous and Holy One. This tendency to vainly be the “ruler/king” with no accountability is

reflected later in Scripture when God makes this vanity a chief sin in the first of the ten commandments "*I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*" Exodus 20:1 KJV) and following in Exodus 20:2: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*". The last part of the genealogy lists the lineage of Abram/Abraham and sets the stage for God's call on this amazing and wonderfully obedient man. The Bible says it this way: "*Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah; and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had other sons and daughters. Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.*"

Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran." (Genesis 11:24-32 NASB)

Note that God called Terah as well as Abram, for Terah left Ur and went to Canaan.

Chapter 12 begins with God's call to Abram "*Go forth*" (Genesis 12:1) followed by Abram's response "*So Abram went forth*" (Genesis 12:4) Abram was 75, hardly an age a "modern" person would begin a new life in an unknown land, following God's call and leaving the comfort, security, and familiarity of an established home. Yet Terah responded to God's call to leave Ur, and Abram boldly left his home and traveled to Canaan with his family and flocks. IT seems that obedience in following God's call and claim on one's life is an important building block for a life of faith. In or local church the Coleman family confidently followed God's call to travel to and minister in Ethiopia, where the cultural and language barriers are challenging to say the least. Why would a comfortable and happy family do such a thing? They were confidently and faithfully following God's call!

Not only did Abram confidently follow God's direction, but when he and his family settled in Canaan he built an altar and worshipped God: "*The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'*" *So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.*" (Genesis 12:7-8 NASB)

Lest we make Abram into a "cardboard character" and a saint who always followed God, we see that he was prone to falsify or tell a "half-truth" about his beautiful wife to avoid issues with the Egyptians. Abram had traveled to Egypt to obtain food due

to a famine in Canaan (a theme we will see later in Genesis), and Abram called his beautiful wife Sarai his sister. This was at best a half truth, since Sarai was his half sister see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah> (but also his wife!): *"Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.'" It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.*

But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go." Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him." (Genesis 12:10-20 NASB)



Sarai Is Taken to Pharaoh's Palace by [James Tissot](#).

January 5, 2019 Genesis 13-15

"Family Feud" is a popular television show in which families vie against each other for prize money or to reward charities (in the "celebrity" version). This theme of discord and dysfunctionality among God's people started with Cain and Abel, with a tragic fratricide, and persisted through Noah's family, in the persons of Abram and Lot. Abram was quite wealthy according to Scripture, not only in gold but in livestock. He and his nephew Lot, though, quarreled over grazing land: *"Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to*

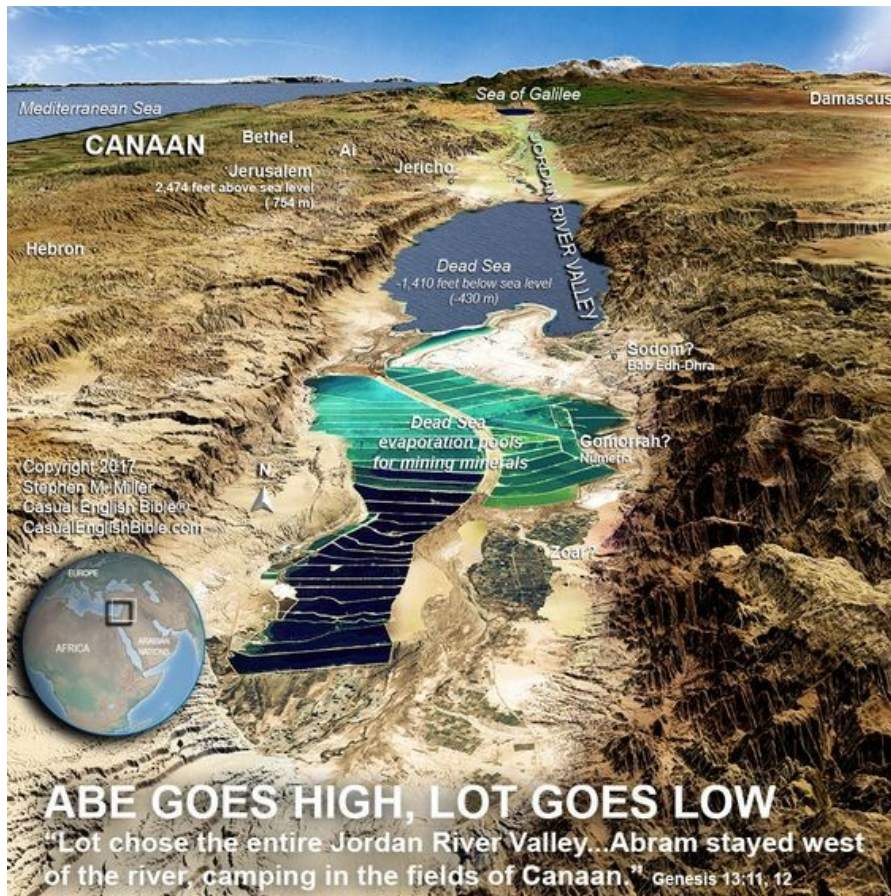
remain together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

*So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left." Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom." (Genesis 13:2-12 NASB). Note that Lot took what he felt was the choicer land, but that choice put him in the midst of a very sinful group of Sodomites! As the Scripture tells us: *"Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord."* (Genesis 13:13 NASB). Matthew Henry's commentary highlights this theme: "Abram having offered Lot the choice, he at once accepted it. Passion and selfishness make men rude. Lot looked to the goodness of the land; therefore he doubted not that in such a fruitful soil he should certainly thrive. But what came of it? Those who, in choosing relations, callings, dwellings, or settlements, are guided and governed by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, cannot expect God's presence or blessing. They are commonly disappointed even in that which they principally aim at. In all our choices this principle should rule, That is best for us, which is best for our souls. Lot little considered the badness of the inhabitants. The men of Sodom were impudent, daring sinners. This was the iniquity of Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, Eze 16:49. God often gives great plenty to great sinners. It has often been the vexatious lot of good men to live among wicked neighbours; and it must be the more grievous, if, as Lot here, they have brought it upon themselves by a wrong choice." (Bible Hub <https://biblehub.com/genesis/13-13.htm>)*

Abram was again reminded of God's amazing Promise and Covenant, and he was faithful to build an altar and worship the Living God: *"The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord."* (Genesis 13:14-18 NASB)

Lot does not have long to wait before his choice of land becomes a trap for him. The "kings" of Sodom and Gomorrah, Zoar, Admah and Zeboiim (kings were here more like the mayors of their towns) captured Lot and his household, causing Abram to send out his forces to rescue him:

“And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. They also took Lot, Abram’s nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.” (Genesis 14:8-12 NASB)

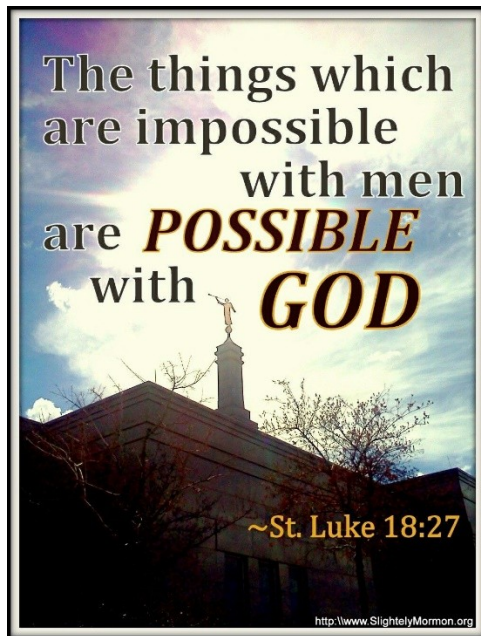


We then see a glimpse of the One who is (and was) to come- a pre-incarnate type of Christ- in the form of Melchizedek, the King of Salem. We can safely assume he was consistent with God’s character, for he accepted a tithe as worship: *“Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”*

He gave him a tenth of all. The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself." Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share." (Genesis 14:17-24 NASB) Melchizadek is seen elsewhere in Scripture (Psalm 110, Hebrews 7:2), and is a person I will certainly question my Lord about when I reach heaven. It is always a source of joy and amazement to me that Jesus appears throughout Scripture, showing Himself through historical, poetic and prophetic literature in the Old Testament (Covenant) as well as the New!

God has certainly not finished blessing His faith servant Abram. God promises Abram a son- a physical descendent, through which His people will multiply and bless the earth. The Scripture puts it this way: *"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."*

Abram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (Genesis 15:1-5 NASB) Abram, human like us, reasoned that God would surely not mean a physical heir- Abram was old, and Sara was barren- surely one born in Abram's household would be Abram's heir. God, however, had other- better- plans- as He always does! Abram would experience the miracle of a child- but only after he took matters in his own hands and had a child with Hagar (Genesis 16). God does the "impossible" all the time- as we see the testimony in Luke's Gospel (Luke 17:27)



What follows is one of the key salvation verses in all of Scripture -Genesis 15:6. The NASB translation reads: "*Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*"

I am particularly fond of the commentary in McLaren's Expositions: "It is remarkable to find this anticipation of New Testament teaching so far back. It is like finding one full-blown flower in a garden where all else is but swelling into bud. No wonder that Paul fastened on it to prove that justification by faith was older than Moses, than law or circumcision, that his teaching was the real original, and that faith lay at the foundation of the Old Testament religion.

1. The Nature of Faith.-The metaphor in the Hebrew word is that of a man leaning all his weight on some strong stay. Surely that metaphor says more than many definitions. It teaches that the essence of faith is absolute reliance, and that unites us with Him on whom we rely. Its result will be steadfastness. We are weak, mobile, apt to be driven hither and thither, but light things lashed to fixed things become fixed. So 'reeds shaken with wind' are changed into iron pillars.

2. The Object of Faith.-'Lord.' It is a Person, not the promise but the Promiser. Of course, reliance on the Person results in acceptance of His word, and here it is God's word as to the future. Our faith has to do with the future, but also with the past. Its object is Christ, the historic Christ, the living Christ, the Christ who will come again. How clear the nature of faith becomes when its object is clear! It cannot be mere assent, but trust. How clear becomes its identity in all ages! The creeds may be different in completeness, but the object of faith is the same, and the emotion is the same.

3. The effect of Faith.-Righteous is conformity to the will of God. Abram was not righteous, but he yielded himself to God and trusted Him, and God accepted that as

the equivalent of righteousness. The acceptance was shown by the Covenant, and by the fulfilment of the promises.

So here is the great truth that faith is accepted for righteous. It is rightly regarded and treated as righteous, by the estimate of God, who estimates things as they really are. It is righteousness, for-

{a} Faith is itself a supreme act of righteousness, as being accordant with God's supreme desire for man.

{b} Faith unites with Christ the righteous.

{c} Faith will blossom out into all righteousness."

(<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/15-6.htm>)

God then sealed His covenant promise with animal sacrifice, putting Abram into a "deep sleep": *And He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." He said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.*

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

God prophesies as to the 400 years of Egyptian captivity that is to come, as well as the ultimate return of His people to the land. God's timing again is perfect- the "iniquity of the Amorite" needed to be completed, as well as the sin of unbelief of God's people after being delivered from Egypt.

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/wilderness-wandering.html>)

"It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite." (Genesis 15:7-21 NASB)

January 6, 2019 Genesis 16-18

Once again Abram shows his unwillingness to "wait upon the Lord" and decides that Hagar, his wife's servant, will be the source of his offspring. I cannot imagine Sarai

approving of such an arrangement, even though polygamy was acceptable at that time. So Ishmael is conceived, and Sarai- seeing the physical reminder of her barrenness and her husband's sexual relations with Hagar, despises Hagar and her unborn offspring Ishmael. The Scripture says: *"Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will [a]obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 After Abram had [b]lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your [c]arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her [d]sight. May the Lord judge between [e]you and me." 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your [f]power; do to her what is good in your [g]sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence."* Genesis 16:1-6 NASB)

God communicates to Hagar by an angel, and assures her of His love and protection. Abram was 86 at the time: *"Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your [i]descendants so that [j]they will be too many to count." 11 The angel of the Lord said to her further,*

"Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name [k]Ishmael, Because the Lord [l]has given heed to your affliction. 12 "He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, And everyone's hand will be against him; And he will [m]live [n]to the east of all his brothers."

13 Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "[o]You are [p]a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even [q]remained alive here after seeing Him?" 14 Therefore the well was called [r]Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to [s]him." (Genesis 16:10-16 NASB)



Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert, by [Grigory Ugryumov](#) (c. 1785)

Some scholars believe Ishmael- a Semite- was the ancestor of the Arabic peoples living in the same fertile land that God gave to his people, the Hebrews. One might wonder why God would allow such a people to flourish and be a constant threat to His chosen people. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishmael>)

God remembered His covenant promise- and 13 years later, when Abram was 99, he is given the blessing of a son Isaac- through Sarai, and both Abram and Sarai are re-named to Abraham (father of nations) and Sara (princess). The covenant includes circumcision of all believing males, as a constant sign and reminder of the covenant. Scripture says it this way: *"23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all the servants who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God had said to him. 24 Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 In the very same day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son. 27 All the men of his household, who were born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him."* (Genesis 17:23-26 NASB)

When told of the son that would be Abraham's heir through Sara, Abraham laughed- yet was clearly assured by God that the descendants of this child would uniquely be His people. God the- as He does so many times- works past and through our sinfulness- ruling and over-ruling our half measures to accomplish His perfect will: *"I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will [m]come from her."* 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, *"Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"* 18 And Abraham said to God, *"Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"* 19 But God said, *"No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name [n]Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his [o]descendants after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will*

bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall [p]become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.” (Genesis 17:6-21 NASB)

God then sends three angels to the “oaks of Mamre” where Abraham’s tent was located, and Abraham once again hears God’s promise of a son by Sara. Abraham laughed (again) at this seemingly impossible promise. His reaction earlier in Chapter 17 were: *“Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” 18 And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!” 19 But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name [n]Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his [o]descendants after him”.* (Genesis 17:17-19 NASB). This is a central part of the narrative- once again Abraham wants his way and asks God to bless Ishmael- but God has a better plan!

Laughing seems to be the order of the day! Sara also laughed at the prospect of an old, previously barren, woman bearing a child. Yet God could- and did- accomplish His purpose through them! The three angels- messengers from God- walked away in their departure and “looked toward Sodom”- where Lot and his family had settled. The angels wonder if Abraham should see what God is about to accomplish- the destruction of Sodom- since Abraham is to become a great nation.

One Abraham understands the dire predicament of Sodom, he “bargains” with God. One might wonder if God then can “change His mind” due to circumstances. Surely it was God’s perfect will to remove these sinful people from the land. One might imagine that these who sinned boldly and disregarded God might be a trap and a sinful influence on God’s people. Whatever the reason- and we will probably never know this side of heaven- God planned to destroy this city and its people. The Bible presents it this way: *20 And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”*

22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not [t] spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do [u] such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth [v] deal justly?” 26 So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will [w] spare the whole place on their account.” 27 And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have [x] ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?” And He said, “I

will not do it on account of the forty.”³⁰ Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”³¹ And he said, “Now behold, I have ^[y]ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.”³² Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten.”³³ As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.” (Genesis 18:20-33 NASB)

Didn't God- who is omniscient- already know the extent of the sinfulness of Sodom- including the number of faithful men among the people there? Why then does God appear to seek out the answer and then change the nature of His response accordingly? (verse 18:21) The answer may lie in the way that God's revelation of Himself proceeds through what we call "time". The ancient peoples interpreted God's action on the basis of their (very incomplete) understanding of God. What seemed to be a God who didn't know the number of the faithful is likely a reflection of their misunderstanding of God himself. See the commentary (<http://www.crive.org/gen18and22.htm>) for a more extensive discussion of this issue of theology.

January 7, 2019 Genesis 19-21

The sins of Sodom...the "sodomites" are a subject of much controversial discussion in the church today. There is a great and growing divide over the authority (and by inference the reliability and inerrancy) of Scripture. Are we to stand with Martin Luther, whose phrase "sola scriptura" (Scripture only) is the basis of our authority, spiritual instruction, and understanding of God? (See : <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-sola-scriptura-mean/>) The Bible claims about itself several key doctrines: *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV) In Isaiah 40 we see these words: *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."* (Isaiah 40:8 NEV) Jesus Himself assumed the authority of the Scriptures: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matthew 5:17 NIV)

Here we have the ugly story of men determined to have their brutal way with Lot's guests: *"Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people [b]from every quarter; 5 and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may [c]have relations with them." 6 But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, 7 and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. 8 Now behold, I have two daughters who have not [d]had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them [e]whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the [f]shelter of my roof." 9 But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in [g]as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we*

will treat you worse than them.” So they pressed hard against [h]Lot and came near to break the door. 10 But the men reached out their [i]hands and brought Lot into the house [j]with them, and shut the door. 11 They [k]struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway.” (Genesis 19:4-11 NASB)

Whatever the sin- homosexual rape, assault, some awful combination of the two- that the “men of Sodom” planned to carry out upon the guests, it was clearly deserving of God’s punishment. Lot is warned clearly by angel messengers to leave with his family to escape the coming destruction: *“When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the [n]punishment of the city.” 16 But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the [o]hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city. 17 When they had brought them outside, [p]one said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay [q]anywhere in the valley; escape to the [r]mountains, or you will be swept away.” (Genesis 19:15-17 NASB)*

The destruction that followed was terrible and complete, bringing to my mind some of the terrible destruction described in the Revelation: *“The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, 25 and He overthrew those cities, and all the [w]valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.*

27 Now Abraham arose early in the morning and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord; 28 and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a [y]furnace.” (Genesis 19:23-28 NASB).

The Lot’s family- perhaps infected by the same sins that prevailed in Sodom, decided to perpetrate their physical line by incest between Lot and his daughters: *“Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the [ab] mountains, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he [ae] stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. 31 Then the firstborn said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man [ae] on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. 32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve [ai] our family through our father.” 33 So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 34 On the following day, the firstborn said to the younger, “Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve [ae] our family through our father.” 35 So they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 36 Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. 37 The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the*

Moabites to this day. ³⁸ As for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the ^[ab]sons of Ammon to this day.” (Genesis 19:30-38 NASB)

The fruits of this incest were the Moabites and Ammonites, perpetual enemies of God’s people!

Abraham, who lied once in Egypt about Sara by calling her sister, does the same to Abimelech: *“Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.” ⁴ Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.” (Genesis 20:1-7)*

Abraham then “apologizes to Abimelech, by claiming that Sara “really’ was his sister- but neglected to include the important fact that she was also his wife. God then restored the fertility of Abimelech’s household: *“And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What have you ^[e]encountered, that you have done this thing?” ¹¹ Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. ¹² Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; ¹³ and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This is ^[e]the kindness which you will show to me: ^[e]everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’” ¹⁴ Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. ¹⁵ Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; ^[e]settle wherever ^[e]you please.” ¹⁶ To Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is ^[e]your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared.” ¹⁷ Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. ¹⁸ For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.” (Genesis 20:10-18 NASB)*

God’s promised miracle then occurs! Isaac is conceived and born, and Abraham faithfully has Isaac (who name means “laughter”) circumcised on the eight day as God required: *“Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had [a]promised. ² So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham*

called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh [b]with me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned." (Genesis 21:1-8 NASB)

We are all so very human, and Sarah showed her humanity by turning against Hagar and Ishmael once she had the son that she desired and God had provided. Her cruelty may have been the result of a long resentment of the arrangement that Abraham would father a child with Sara's servant. God, being eternally merciful, had compassion on the exiled Hagar and Ishmael and preserved them both. I have wondered if God did this as a reminder to Abraham and his descendants as to the consequences of disobedience. The Scripture tells us: *"Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, [c]mocking. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son [d]Isaac." 11 The matter [e]distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "[f]Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac [g]your descendants shall be named. 13 And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your [h]descendant." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a [i]skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.*

15 When the water in the skin was used up, she [j]left the boy under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me [k]see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. 17 God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by [l]the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the [m]skin with water and gave the lad a drink." (Genesis 21:9-19 NASB)



Gustav Dore Hagar and Ishmael Dying in the Wilderness

And God caused Ishmael to thrive and prosper: *"God was with the lad, and he grew; and he [n]lived in the wilderness and became an archer. 21 He [o]lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt."* (Genesis 21:20-21 NASB)

Abraham then makes a covenant with Abimelech, who he previously deceived, to leave peacefully in Abimelech's land. (Genesis 21:22-34)

January 8, 2019 Genesis 22-24

God's test of Abraham...would he offer to God his son...his only son...the son of the Covenant Promise? WE struggle with this...did God "approve" child sacrifice- the detestable practice of followers of pagan religions that so often surrounded God's people? Did Abraham believe that God would resurrect Isaac from the dead? Did Abraham truly simply trust God- after all, he had trusted God for so much in the past! We don't know the state of mind or heart of Abraham- the Scripture merely tells us what transpired: *"Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering*

and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will [a]provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together." (Genesis 22:1-8 NASB)

And God provided a lamb- just in time- as He always is! The lamb to many Christians is a "type" of Christ- the Lamb of God- who takes away the sin of the world by His sacrifice later in history. (John 1:29; Rev 12:11). One of my favorite spiritual songs is "God Hath Provided the Lamb"

(<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=sing+halelujus+god+has+provided+the+lamb&view=detail&mid=FA154358ACE0303E6D2BFA154358ACE0303E6D2B&FORM=VIRE>). And God did just that...

"Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you [b]fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place [c]The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will [d]be provided." (Genesis 21:9-14 NASB)

God then renews His promise to Abraham- swearing "by Himself" that He will provide offspring and a promised land for them: *"Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your [e]seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your [f]seed shall possess the gate of [g]their enemies. 18 In your [h]seed all the nations of the earth shall [i]be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 21:15-18 NASB)*

Since I am an avid Tech fan, I often tease fans of other schools by solemnly (with tongue in cheek) claiming that our mascot is in the Bible. He is found in Genesis 21:21 "Buz his brother" of course whimsically showing that Buzz, the Ga Tech mascot, has early Biblical origin. Sometime when dealing with UGa fans I remind them that "dogs" in the Scripture are a generally despicable lot!

The beautiful Sarah then dies, and Abraham seeks a proper place of burial, finally settling on a purchased cave in Hebron: *"Now [a]Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham [b]went in to*

mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. 3 Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 4 "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me [c]a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." (Genesis 22:1-4) Abraham's words echo in those of his grandson Jacob in Egypt, speaking to the Pharaoh *"And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."* (Genesis 37:9) We are all sojourners and pilgrims on this earth- this is not our permanent home!

Isaac grows to maturity, and now needs a wife. God fills this need, in an extravagant and wonderful way. After all, doesn't God delight in giving His children gifts? James tells us *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* James 1:17 ESV; Matthew's gospel tells us *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* (Matthew 7:11 ESV). The "gift" in this case is exactly the right wife for Isaac, Rebekah, who is described in Genesis 23 as: *"very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had [f]had relations with her"* (Genesis 24:16). God could have chosen anyone to be the bride of Isaac, but shows His extravagant love by providing one who was not only beautiful but beautiful in spirit, showing kindness and wonderful upbringing. She gave Isaac's servant water, and then quickly provided for the camels as well: *"Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar." 18 She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. 19 Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking." 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels."* (Genesis 24:17-20 NASB)



Isaac's servant recognizes this gift from God- she is in the family of God's people..! He gives thanks: *"He said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham,*

who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers." (Genesis 24:27 NASB) Rebekah has a brother named Laban (Genesis 24:29)- we will see him later as he deals with Jacob! The newly gifted bride to be is then sent to Isaac with a blessing (and an entourage!): *"Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 They blessed Rebekah and said to her,*

"May you, our sister,

Become thousands of ten thousands,

And may your [u]descendants possess

The gate of those who hate them." (Genesis 24:59-60 NASB)

Isaac then marries the lovely Rebekah, and is comforted after his mother Sara's death: "Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." (Genesis 24:67 NASB)

January 9, 2019 Genesis 25-27

Abram then marries another wife, fathers several children, but is careful to leave his inheritance to Isaac and his family. The Scripture records that Abraham gave "gifts" to the other children and "sent them away", perhaps preserving his best for Isaac and family: *"Now Abraham took another wife, [a]whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. 3 Jokshan [b]became the father of Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. 4 The sons of Midian were Ephah and Ephraim and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these were the sons of Keturah. 5 Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; 6 but to the sons of [c]his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east."* (Genesis 25:1-6 NASB)

Abram then dies, at an age that would be a world's record for longevity in this age, at 175 years and was buried with his beloved wife Sarah: *"These are [d]all the years of Abraham's life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Abraham breathed his last and died in a [e]ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people. 9 Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, 10 the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife. 11 It came about after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac [f]lived by Beer-lahai-roi."* Genesis 25:7-11 (NASB)

Ishmael's descendants are listed, along with his age at death of 137. I have wondered if this "parallel" family was retained by God as a threat, a reminder, and a spiritual "landmark" of the consequences of Abraham's insistence on his own plan of having physical descendants.

God, who is the God of surprises and serendipity, answer's Isaac and Rebekah's prayers for children by giving them twins. Furthermore, two more different and difficult twins could hardly be found. The children are described by God as being of "two nations" (Genesis 25:23), and again, surprisingly, the older was to serve the younger! Have we seen this pattern before? "The first shall be last (Luke 13:30 Matthew 20:16), the least the greatest among you" (Matthew 11:11), and so on with the many contradictions that form the surprising pattern of God's dealings with us! The firstborn was hairy and red (Hebrew "Edom"), and was followed in birth by one who grasped his heel (Jacob- "grasper").

And the scheming Jacob would soon steal the birthright- and later the blessing- from his older brother: 27 *When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a [s]peaceful man, [t]living in tents. 28 Now Isaac loved Esau, because [u]he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. 29 When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was [v]famished; 30 and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of [w]that red stuff there, for I am [x]famished." Therefore his name was called [y]Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "[z]First sell me your birthright."* 32 *Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?"* 33 *And Jacob said, "[aa]First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.* (Genesis 25:27-34 NASB)

Isaac moved among the Philistines because of a "famine", and seemed to be infected with the same brand of lying as his father Abraham. Isaac, too, had a beautiful wife, and he also lied about her- claiming her to be his sister- when confronted! The Scriptures tell us: *"Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 The Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; [a]stay in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your [b]descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will multiply your [c]descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your [d]descendants all these lands; and by your [e]descendants all the nations of the earth [f]shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham [g]obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."*

6 So Isaac [h]lived in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "[i]the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." 8 It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. 9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'I might die on account of her.'" 10 Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would

have brought guilt upon us.” 11 So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, “He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.” (Genesis 26:1-11 NASB

According to the “authoritative source” Wikipedia, this is the same Abimelech that Abraham lied to about Sarah: “Abimelech was most prominently the name of a polytheistic king of [Gerar](#) who is mentioned in two of the three [wife-sister narratives in Genesis](#), in connection with both [Abraham](#) (chap. 20) and [Isaac](#) (chap. 26).” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abimelech>)

God repeats his blessing of Abraham to Isaac, citing Abraham’s faithfulness and obedience (Gen 26:3-5). Then, as often happens with nomadic peoples dependent on water- specifically well water- there is a dispute over wells. Eventually a covenant was reached with Abimelech. Interestingly, one of the driving forces to establishment of the covenant was the sense of Godliness about Isaac and his family and workers. The men of Gerar put it this way: *28 They said, “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you; so we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, even between [ab]you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you [ac]and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.’” (Genesis 26:28-29 NASB).* Oh that our witness would be as consistent, positive and winning as that!

The great deception now occurs. Isaac, old and nearly blind, prepares to give his blessing to his oldest son Esau. This was no trivial matter! Please see (<https://www.gotquestions.org/fathers-blessing.html>) for more details. To thwart the expected blessing of Esau, Jacob and his mother had to conspire and perform trickery. One might wonder why Rebekah would conspire with Jacob...was he her “favorite”? Did she fear the rough outdoorsman that her firstborn had become? Did she remember that Esau was a thorn in Jacob’s side (Genesis 26:34-35)? Whatever the reason, the deception was elaborate and successful. The Scripture records these events like this: *5 Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, 7 ‘Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.’ 8 Now therefore, my son, listen to [b]me [c]as I command you. 9 Go now to the flock and [d]bring me two choice [e]young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. 10 Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death.” 11 Jacob [f]answered his mother Rebekah, “Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. 12 Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a [g]deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing.” 13 But his mother said to him, “Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.” 14 So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the [h]best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the [i]young goats on his hands and on the smooth*

part of his neck. 17 She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, [j]to her son Jacob.

18 Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that [k]you may bless me." 20 Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me." 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." 25 So he said, "Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that [l]I may bless you." And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said,

"See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed; 28 Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, And of the fatness of the earth, And an abundance of grain and new wine; 29 May peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, And may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you." (Genesis 27:1-29 NASB)



Isak välsignar Jakob. (1 Mos. 27: 18–29.)

So in a sense Jacob passed the “food” and “smell” tests! The stolen birthright and blessing were both clearly in God’s plan, as we shall see later in the narrative. Jacob’s sons were to become patriarchs in their own right, leading the twelve tribes of Israel. Each were to be later blessed by Jacob and would form the basis of the structure of God’s people for thousands of years. Yet this was all based on deceit and trickery. Could it be that God can use fallible, sinful human beings to accomplish His purposes? The anger Esau felt was real, and he threatened to kill Jacob: ⁴¹ *So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said ^[v]to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”*⁴² *Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, “Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you. ⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, ^[w]flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! ⁴⁴ Stay with him a few days, until your brother’s fury ^[x]subsides, ⁴⁵ until your brother’s anger ^[y]against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?”*

⁴⁶ *Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am tired of ^[z]living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?”* (Genesis 27:41-46 NASB) We will see many cases where what man intended for evil is used by God for good! (Genesis 50:20).

January 10, 2019 Genesis 28-30

The brothers are still divided! Jacob follows his father’s directions to leave Canaan and avoid intermarriage with Canaanite women, but Esau does just that to spite his family. The Scriptures tell us:” *So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. 3 May ^[a]God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. 4 May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your ^[b]descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.” 5 Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.*

6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,” 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. 8 So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased ^[c]his father Isaac; 9 and Esau went to

Ishmael, and [d]married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth." (Genesis 28:1-9 NASB)

We then see Jacob encounter a strange visitation from God- a visitation, a vision, and a "wrestling match". The ladder itself has been interpreted by some to be a prophetic vision of Jesus Himself (John 1:51) *"And he (Jesus) said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'"* (ESV)" Some have suggested that this ladder or stairway represents God reaching to earth, just as man had (sinfully) reached for heaven in the form of the Tower of Babel (<https://www.thoughtco.com/jacobs-ladder-bible-story-summary-700200>). However the theology, it is certainly a dramatic sequence of events: *"Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 He [e]came to [f]a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it [g]under his head, and lay down in that place. 12 He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the Lord stood [h]above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your [i]descendants. 14 Your [j]descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will [k]spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your [l]descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have [m]promised you." 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."*

18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put [n]under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. 19 He called the name of that place [o]Bethel; however, [p]previously the name of the city had been Luz. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I [q]take, and will give me [r]food to eat and garments to wear, 21 and I return to my father's house in [s]safety, then the Lord will be my God. 22 This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." (Genesis 28:10-22 NASB) The scheming Jacob made an altar and a promise to worship God and honor Him with a tenth (tithe)!



Jacob's Ladder-illustration from the 1728 *Figures de la Bible*; illustrated by Gerard Hoet (1648-1733)

"She was so pretty I just had to cry." This literally is what Jacob did after kissing the lovely Rachel (Genesis 30:11). Remember Laban? His daughters were soon to be the center of a 14 year indentured servanthood by Jacob. He desperately wanted to marry Rachel, but was instead provided Rachel's older sister Leah. One might wonder how this was possible...couldn't Jacob see who his bride was at the wedding? Customs then called for the bride to be veiled, and only revealed to her new husband in darkness. He would not see his bride's face until the following morning (see: <https://thetorah.com/how-is-it-possible-that-jacob-mistakes-leah-for-rachel/>; <https://www.gotquestions.org/Leah-and-Rachel.html>). Either way, Jacob's seven years of labor were to be followed by another seven to finally marry the beautiful Rachel. The story reads this way: " *Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my [d]relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and [e]face. 18 Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.*" (Genesis 30:15-20 NASB)

The trap was then sprung, and Jacob had another seven years to serve! *"Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my [f]time is completed, that I may go in to her." 22 Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. 23 Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her. 24 Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 25 So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then*

have you deceived me?" 26 But Laban said, "It is not [g]the practice in our place to [h]marry off the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years." 28 Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. 29 Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. 30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with [i]Laban for another seven years." (Genesis 30:21-30 NASB)

God has a special compassion for the unloved- He gave Leah great fertility, but kept Rachel barren. Leah was the mother of Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah- key figures (and tribes) in Israel. Judah of course, was the physical ancestor of Jesus!

Rachel would only be the mother of Joseph, the "favorite son" the one whom Jacob loved perhaps more than the other sons. The story of Genesis from here on is the story of Jacob's sons (and the blessings he gives to them). How ironic that Joseph's sons would also receive a "reverse blessing" from Jacob, the beneficiary of such a blessing himself (Genesis 48:8-20).

Joseph and Laban then agree on the division of livestock, and Jacob proves to be more than a match for Laban: *27 But Laban said to him, "If now [o]it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the Lord has blessed me on your account." 28 He [p]continued, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." 29 But he said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have [q]fared with me. 30 For you had little before [r]I came and it has [s]increased to a multitude, and the Lord has blessed you [t]wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?" 31 So he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this one thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flock: 32 let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black [u]one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages. 33 So my [v]honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my [w]wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, will be considered stolen." 34 Laban said, "[x]Good, let it be according to your word." 35 So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the [y]care of his sons. 36 And he put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.*

37 Then Jacob [z]took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was [aa]in the rods. 38 He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, even in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they [ab]mated when they came to drink. 39 So the flocks [ac]mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 40 Jacob separated the lambs, and [ad]made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds

apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. 41 Moreover, whenever the [ae]stronger of the flock [af]were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might [ag]mate by the rods; 42 but when the flock was feeble, he did not put them in; so the feeble were Laban's and the [ah]stronger Jacob's. 43 So the man [ai]became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys." (Genesis 30:27-43 NASB) Certainly a biologist would struggle to explain how "gene manipulation" could be accomplished this way!

(<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/19703/Streaked-Speckled-Spotted-Offspring.htm>; <https://biblicalfoundations.weebly.com/is-jacobs-stick-trick-scientific.html>)

January 11, 2019 Genesis 31-33

More dysfunctionality in the Laban/Jacob family! Jacob's cleverness caused his flocks to increase and be vigorous and healthy, while Laban's went in the opposite direction. And now Laban's shepherds and others started to complain that Jacob had "cheated" them! The bad blood got to the point where Jacob could clearly see that he and his household must move away. He shows his human nature by "sneaking away in the dark". Laban's daughter Rachel even takes the "family idols". Why did the godly Laban have "family idols" at all? The consensus seems to be that these were "teraphim" and were used as a part of the worship of God, so they were not "false gods" but part of (incorrect) worship

(<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/2516/what-are-the-teraphim-household-gods-rachel-stole-from-laban>) Laban rightly considered them his property, and Jacob apparently did not know of the theft: *"Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; 18 and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. 19 When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the [k]household idols that were her father's. 20 And Jacob [l]deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. 21 So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead."* (Genesis 31:17-21 NASB)

Jacob felt falsely accused, but certainly should have realized a father would at least want to say his goodbyes to children and grandchildren! The two make a covenant between them, and mark the covenant/place with stones. We will see this pattern throughout the Old Covenant See

(<https://thewhisperofgod.wordpress.com/2015/03/23/covenants-and-stones/>): *"Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob said to Laban, 'What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? 37 Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my [y]kinsmen and your [z]kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. 38 These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 That which was torn of beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40*

Thus I was: by day the [aa]heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night.” Then Laban replied to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? 44 So now come, let us make a covenant, [ab]you and I, and let it be a witness between [ac]you and me.” 45 Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar.” (Genesis 31:36-45 NASB)

Remember Esau? He was “armed and dangerous”- having gathered “400 men” with him and Jacob was justifiably afraid! His response showed some of his cleverness- he divided the family into two groups, reasoning that if one were attached the other could flee and survive: “ 6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; 8 for he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and [d]attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.” (Genesis 32: 6-8 NASB) He also planned to appease Esau with extravagant gifts: “So he spent the night there. Then he [k]selected from what [l]he had with him a present for his brother Esau: 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16 He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on before me, and put a space between droves.” 17 He commanded the [m]one in front, saying, “When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?’ 18 then you shall say, ‘These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.’” 19 Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, “After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; 20 and you shall say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” Genesis 32:13-20 NASB)

We then encounter a defining moment in the history of God’s people- Jacob wrestles all night with a being, which we come to find is either an angel of God or- more likely- God Himself! The name given to Jacob becomes “Israel”- one who “strives with God”. God’s plans will be fulfilled through Jacob’s family. Though he was sinful- manipulative, selfish and cleverly evil- God used him! What an inspiration that God uses whomever He wishes at whatever time to accomplish His purposes among men! The Scripture describes the scene like this: “24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When he saw that he had

not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but [n]Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place [o]Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my [p]life has been preserved." 31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel, and he was limping on his thigh. 32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip." (Genesis 32:24-32 NASB) Jacob marvels that he has seen the face of God and has not been consumed or destroyed. Would it be that we would reverence our God this much!



Jacob Wrestles With God by JC Stiles Art

"Women and children first"...a rule seen in disasters when the escape of everyone is not likely. We see a touching example of this in the stories of the evacuation of the Titanic (<https://adventure.howstuffworks.com/titanic7.htm>). In this case, though, the women and children were a "buffer" between Esau and Jacob. Jacob deliberately exposed the most vulnerable in his company to the greatest potential danger! However, Esau was conciliatory and forgiving: "Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children [a]among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 He put the maids and their children [b]in front, and Leah and her children [c]next, and Rachel and Joseph [d]last. 3 But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 He lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, "[e]Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maids came near [f]with their children, and they bowed down. 7 Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. 8 And he said, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." 10 Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, [g]for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. 11 Please take my [h]gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have [i]plenty." Thus he urged him and he took it." (Genesis 33:1-11 NASB)

Crisis averted...by the gracious God who put forgiveness and kindness in Esau's heart! What a testimony to the heart and life changing power of God! Jacob then settles in Shechem and Cain in Seir, and Jacob makes an altar- a commemoration and called the altar "El-Elohe- Israel" (God- the God of Israel). Was he relieved, surprised, and grateful for God's goodness and the forgiving spirit He had put in Esau? The events are described in this way: *"Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. 19 He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred [n]pieces of money. 20 Then he erected there an altar and called it [o]El-Elohe-Israel." Genesis 33:18-20 NASB)*

January 12, 2019 Genesis 34-36

Family honor...and the honor of a daughter. These are subjects full of emotion and controversy to this day. In Jacob's family, not only sons but daughters were born. We hear mostly about the sons, since this Scripture reflects the patriarchal society at the time, but the rules of descent for the Jewish people go through the mother- not the father. The common sense reason is that there is never any doubt as to who one's mother is!

In this story of trickery, revenge and the aftermath of revenge we see the central issue is the honor of Dinah- Jacob's daughter by Leah. One of the Hivites- who were Canaanites (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hivite>)- was strongly attracted to Dinah and raped her: *"Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to [a]visit the daughters of the land. 2 When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her [b]by force." (Genesis 34:1-2 NASB)* Since Shechem was so deeply attracted to her, Dinah's brothers laid a trap with her as bait. They would allow the marriage, they said, but only if the household of Shechem were all circumcised! On the third day after circumcision, when the men were all "in pain", the brothers attacked them and killed them all: *"Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and*

came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. 26 They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth. 27 Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. 28 They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; 29 and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses." (Genesis 34:25-29 NASB)

Jacob was worried that this drastic action of his sons Simeon and Levi would bring trouble, but they argued that their sister's honor and dignity were at stake: *"Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and [s]my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and [t]attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household."* 31 But they said, *"Should he [u]treat our sister as a harlot?"* (Genesis 34:30-31 NASB)

God instructs His servant to move- and the faithful servants do just that! Terah and Abram, and now Jacob were told to "pull up roots" and move to a place of God's choosing. How hard it is sometimes to see the wisdom of God, and the blessings He holds for those who follow His direction! Jacob was faithful and did as God commanded: *"As they journeyed, there was [f]a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. 6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 He built an altar there, and called the place [g]El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled [h]from his brother. 8 Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named [i]Allon-bacuth."* (Genesis 35:5-8 NASB) God's protection was shown by the "great terror" that prevented the Canaanites from attacking this relatively small band of travelers.

When Jacob reaches his destination, a blessing awaits. God renames Jacob as Israel "God struggles with/judges" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_\(name\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_(name))). God repeats the blessing of a multitude of descendants who will live in this land, including kings: *Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; [j]You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called [k]him Israel. 11 God also said to him,*

"I am [l]God Almighty;

Be fruitful and multiply;

A nation and a company of nations shall [m]come from you,

And kings shall [n]come forth from [o]you.

12 "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,

I will give it to you,

And I will give the land to your [p]descendants after you."

13 Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him. 14 Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. 15 So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, [q]Bethel.” (Genesis 35:9-15 NASB)



Jacob's Altar at Bethel

Rachel dies giving birth to Jacob's last son Benjamin, and Reuben "lays with" one of his father's concubines, a fact which Jacob apparently knew. Interestingly (and maybe puzzlingly and horrifyingly) there appears to be no consequence to Reuben's incest (<https://thetorah.com/did-reuben-lie-with-bilhah/>): *"Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she [r]suffered severe labor. 17 When she was in severe labor the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have another son." 18 It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him [s]Ben-oni; but his father called him [t]Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day. 21 Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the [u]tower of [v]Eder.*

22 It came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it." (Genesis 34:16-22 NASB)

After the Scripture lists Jacob's sons, then a brief account is given of Isaac's death at 180 years of age and his burial. Esau and Jacob appeared to work in harmony in honoring their father in his burial: *"Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. 29 Isaac breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, an old man [w]of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." (Genesis 34:28-29 NASB)*

The Scripture then lists the genealogy of Esau in some detail. Why, we might ask, was such detail devoted to the families of what would become the Edomites? As

seen in the later histories of Israel and Edom, the two tribes/families warred and competed constantly. The prophesy of Scripture that the older (Edom) would serve the younger (Jacob/Israel) was fulfilled in later history. Once again, the reliability and accuracy of prophesy is clearly demonstrated.

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/Edomites.html>) Perhaps we might rationalize this is the disobedience of Esau as evidenced in his intermarriage with the pagan Cannanites: *"Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; 3 also Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth."* (Genesis 36:2-3 NASB)

January 13, 2019 Genesis 37-39

What happens when a parent (or parents) show "favoritism"- loving one child more than others- and perhaps showing this greater affection in obvious ways? Trouble inevitably results. Just as Jacob was more loved by his mother, and Esau his father, Joseph was more loved than his brothers. The rest of Genesis is a narrative about Joseph, a remarkably gifted person who nonetheless was foolish in trumpeting his gifts in front of his siblings. We read: *"Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the account of Jacob's family line.*

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate[a] robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind." (Genesis 37:1-11 NASB)

The opportunity for revenge against this favored sibling came later, when the older brothers were tending flocks near Dothan (from which Dothan, Alabama gets its

name). They initially wanted to kill him, but instead imprisoned him in a cistern and sold him into slavery. To cover their misdeed, the soaked Joseph's beautiful multicolored robe in animal blood. Thus the deceiver Jacob was deceived, and mourned the loss of the child of his old age. Interestingly (to me, at least), the youngest son Benjamin, also the child of Jacob's old age, was not held in such high esteem as Joseph. Reuben, the oldest son, seemed to be the only brother with a sense of decency and wisdom, and was Joseph's only advocate: *"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."*

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. 22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels[b] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. 30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" (Genesis 37:19-30 NASB)

Once this deception was made, and Jacob's mourning had begun for his lost (presumed dead) son, Joseph's earthly fate was now with Potiphar, a high official in the Egyptian government: *"Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."*

33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites[c] sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard." (Genesis 37:31-36 NASB)

"...Meanwhile, back at the ranch" the phrase used to go in western movies and television shows. While Joseph was beginning his life in exile, Judah, whose tribe was to be part of the earthly genealogy of Jesus, married outside the tribe. The Canaanites were a constant source of both temptation and trouble to the Hebrews (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Canaanites.html>) Judah's sons by Shua, his Cannanite wife, were Er, Onan and Shelah. Er was apparently so wicked that God put him to death: *"Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death."* (Genesis 38:6-7 NASB) We will see other instances where the "wicked" are destroyed by God. This seems amazingly harsh to a modern reader, but removal by death was reported a number of times in the Scripture. God's view of death appears to be quite different than ours, as the Scripture reminds us: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV)

Now that Er was dead, Onan is told to impregnate his brother's wife and thereby perpetuate his brother's physical line of descent. Onan decides to stop short of his "duty" and spill his semen instead of impregnating her, and God deemed this disobedience wicked enough to deserve death: *"Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother." 9 But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. 10 What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death also."* (Genesis 38:8-9 NASB)

Judah then loses his wife, and encounters Tamar on the road- disguised by a veil. As was the case with Jacob, Judah does not recognize the "veiled woman" and decides to sleep with her, thinking her to be a prostitute. This encounter leads to Tamar's pregnancy, and the assumption that she has sinned and deserved punishment. But Tamar was wise (and clever) in getting a "signature" from the man she encountered- Judah- and the incestuous relationship is revealed: *"When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep," 14 she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.*

15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. 16 Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you."

"And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked.

17 "I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said.

"Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked.

18 He said, "What pledge should I give you?"

"Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. 19 After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

20 Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. 21 He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?"

"There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said.

22 So he went back to Judah and said, "I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, 'There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here.'"

23 Then Judah said, "Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her."

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant."

Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!"

25 As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are."

26 Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again." (Genesis 38:13-26 NASB)

Once again, twins were born- Perez (breaking out) and Zerah (scarlet or brightness) : "When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb." (Genesis 38:27) Perez is a part of the physical ancestry of Jesus (https://www.biblewise.com/bible_study/characters/tamars-twins.php). Once again we see that God can use anyone in any circumstance to accomplish His purposes. In Jesus' physical genealogy we see Perez, a son of incest, and Obed, the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David who was Ruth's (a Moabitess!) son with Boaz. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boaz>).

Then we find in the following chapter another story of sex and intrigue. The handsome young Joseph is attractive to Potiphar's wife. Joseph made the best of his very bad situation first by striving to serve his Egyptian master with integrity and efficiency. However, Potiphar's wife was so taken by Joseph that she plotted elaborately to sleep with him. When he (correctly and righteously) refused her advances, he was accused of rape! This was certainly not a time of "Me Too", but the crime of rape was taken very seriously. The accusation itself resulted in Joseph

being jailed: *Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"*

8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

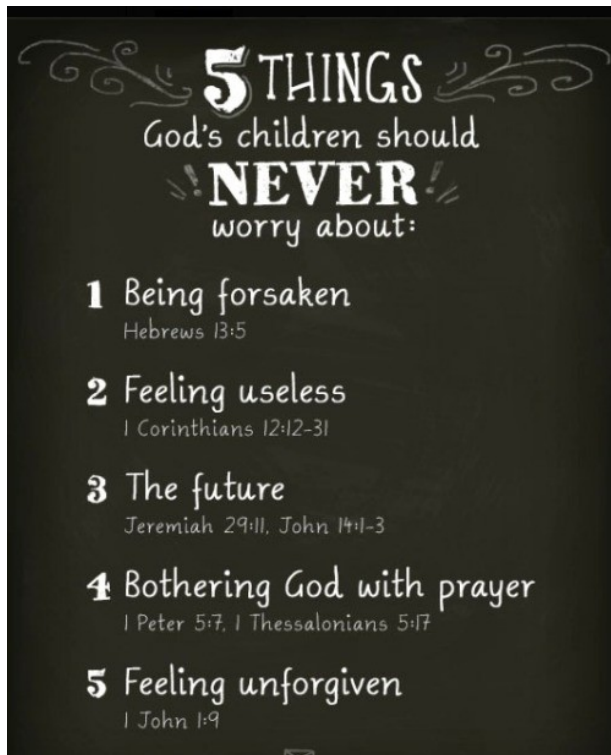
11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. 20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined." (Genesis 39:6-20 NASB)

The key phrase of the following narrative about Joseph in prison was "God was with him". Because God is the "forever with us" God, we too can overcome the world and its sorrows, tragedies and temptations! As God was to tell Moses later "I am who/that I am" (Exodus 3:14) This has enormous consequences for us, God's children (<https://www.gotquestions.org/I-AM-WHO-I-AM-Exodus-3-14.html>) God is the God who is with us, and will never forsake us (Deut 3:16; Heb 13:5-6). Joseph was successful and overcame obstacles because God was with him: *"But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."* (Genesis 39:20-23 NASB)



January 14, 2019 Genesis 40-42

How do we interpret dreams? Are they simply the subconscious working out problems, or the random consideration of possibilities, problems, or issues that face us in our waking hours? Some dreams are used by God to communicate with us, but dreams are always a difficult thing to interpret correctly. Joseph was given the ability to interpret prophetic dreams- a gift he wholly attributed to God.

When asked by two cellmates to interpret their dreams, Joseph correctly predicted the prophetic visions that these two were given. The cupbearer was to have a happy outcome: *"So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, 'In my dream, [g]behold, there was a vine in front of me; 10 and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes. 11 Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's [h]hand.' 12 Then Joseph said to him, 'This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; 13 within three more days Pharaoh will [i]lift up your head and restore you to your [j]office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. 14 Only [k]keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness [l]by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. 15 For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the [m]dungeon.'"* (Genesis 40:9-15 NASB)

Two results occurred almost immediately: 1) the cupbearer forgot about Joseph after he was restored to his former position; 2) the baker- seeing the positive interpretation given to the cupbearer- wanted Joseph to interpret his dream as well.

Unfortunately for the baker, his outcome was not so pleasant: *"When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; 17 and in the top basket there were some of all [n]sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." 18 Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; 19 within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you."*

20 Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his [o]ffice, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's [p]hand; 22 but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them." (Genesis 40:16-22 NASB)

These dreams- and their interpretation- took place so that the Pharaoh's dreams could be interpreted by Joseph. Once the word was out that this Hebrew captive could interpret dreams, the Pharaoh sent for Joseph to interpret his disturbing dreams. It is important to note that Joseph's interpretation had several effects- it showed clearly that God- the "true God" was superior to the false gods used by the "magicians" (Genesis 41:24), and also placed Joseph in a very favorable light. Joseph correctly, and boldly, gave credit to God alone for the interpretation.

Joseph offered not only the interpretation of the years of plenty and famine which were to come, but offered an ideal solution to the problems implied by the dream: *"Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's [x]dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the [y]dreams are one and the same. 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. 28 [z]It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. 29 Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; 30 and after them seven years of famine will [aa]come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will [ab]ravage the land. 31 So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. 32 Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. 33 Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers [ac]in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. 35 Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. 36 Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine." 37 Now the [ad]proposal seemed good [ae]to Pharaoh and [af]to all his servants."* (Genesis 41:25-37 NASB)

Pharaoh realized that Joseph would be the ideal person to manage the solution he had given to the famine, and the Pharaoh elevated Joseph to second in all of Egypt. From the dungeon to the palace- and all at age 30! And a royal wife thrown in for good measure...! The Scripture says: *"Then Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?'" 39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. 40 You shall be over my house, and according to your [ag]command all my people shall [ah]do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." 41 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42 Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. 43 He had him ride in [ai]his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "[aj]Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without [ak]your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45 Then Pharaoh named Joseph [al]Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of [am]On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:38-45)*

Joseph starts a family- his first born is Manessah ("to forget") and the second son was Ephraim ("fruitfulness"), named according to the great works God had done for Joseph. In all of this meteoric rise from prisoner to ruler, Joseph gave God the credit for everything- for "the Lord was with him" (Genesis 39:3). How much could we all accomplish if we constantly praised God and gave Him credit for the good things in our lives? The stage is now set for the reunion of Joseph and his family, for the news that there was grain in Egypt went out to the whole region, where there was severe famine: *"The people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth."* (Genesis 41:57 NASB)

Joseph's brothers are sent by Jacob/Israel to Egypt, but Jacob keeps Benjamin behind. Benjamin- the youngest son born as his mother died, was especially precious to Jacob since he was the remaining child of his "old age". The Bible says: *"Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, 'Why are you staring at one another?'" 2 He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us [a]from that place, so that we may live and not die." 3 Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him." 5 So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also."* (Genesis 42:1-5 NASB) The memory of Joseph's "loss" still was a powerful one to Jacob!

The brothers bow to Joseph, and Joseph remembers his boyhood dream. Joseph shows his humanity by taunting them and putting them in prison for three days. They are to go and bring the youngest brother Benjamin to prove that they are not "spies": *"Joseph remembered the dreams which he [b]had about them, and said to them, 'You are spies; you have come to look at the [c]undefended parts of our land.'" 10 Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy*

food. 11 We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies." 12 Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the [d]undefended parts of our land!" 13 But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive." 14 Joseph said to them, "It is as I said [e]to you, you are spies; 15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16 Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." 17 So he put them all together in prison for three days." (Genesis 42:9-17 NASB)



Joseph's Brothers Bow Before Him (<http://weareisrael.org/2014/09/23/josephs-brothers/>)

The guilt that Joseph's brothers all felt about their harsh treatment of Joseph remained and was brought to their awareness in the peril that they faced, and Reuben remembers his words to his younger brothers: ⁹ *if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in [u]your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.*" And they did so. ²¹ *Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us."* ²² *Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell [g]you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? [h]Now comes the reckoning for his blood."* (Genesis 42:19-22 NASB)

Joseph holds Simeon hostage, fulfils the request for grain, but places each brother's money- the payment for the grain in the mouth of each grain bag. Joseph has cleverly "rigged" the transaction so that the brothers will return, along with Benjamin as he demanded. Joseph understood human nature, and the personalities

of his brothers and father, very well. His aim was not revenge, but restoration. I am sure he fought with his impulses to punish and not to forgive, but the Spirit of God was clearly in Joseph, and God's plan rather than Joseph's impulse for revenge was carried out.

When the family realizes their dire situation, it is almost too much for Jacob/Israel to bear- Simeon is captive in Egypt, Joseph (Jacob believes) is gone, and now Benjamin's presence is demanded in Egypt: *"Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. 36 Their father Jacob said to them, 'You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.' 37 Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, 'You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my [l]care, and I will return him to you.' 38 But [m]Jacob said, 'My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey [n]you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."* (Genesis 42:35-38 NASB)

January 15, 2019 Genesis 43-45

The grain ran out...as it inevitably does. It was time to return to Egypt and the storehouse of grain and purchase more. Jacob naturally objects to the terms of "the man" (Joseph) to bring the youngest brother with them, but Judah pledges protection for Benjamin: *"Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' 3 Judah spoke to him, however, saying, 'The man solemnly warned [a]us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 4 If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. 5 But if you do not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 6 Then Israel said, 'Why did you treat me so badly [b]by telling the man whether you still had another brother?' 7 But they said, 'The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' So we [c]answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down? 8 Judah said to his father Israel, 'Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. 9 I myself will be surety for him; [d]you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then [e]let me bear the blame before you forever. 10 For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice."*

11 Then their father Israel said to them, 'If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your [f]bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little [g]balm and a little honey, [h]aromatic gum and [i]myrrh, pistachio

nuts and almonds. 12 Take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. 13 Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; 14 and may [j]God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” 15 So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.” (Genesis 43:1-15 NASB) They “sweetened the pot” with gifts, took back the money they originally brought (hoping its return to them was a mistake, and once more appeared before Joseph (who they took as an Egyptian official).

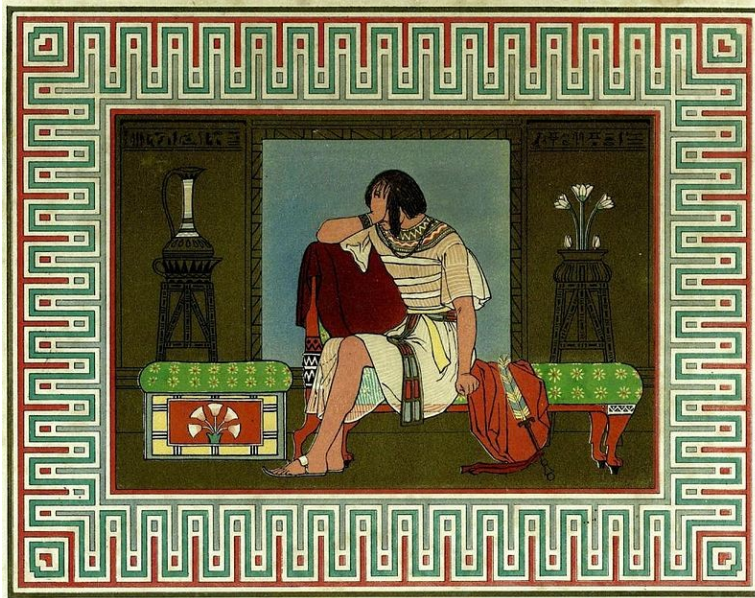
Joseph’s emotions must have been overwhelming- he saw his brothers again, longed to see his father, and saw Benjamin for the first time in many years. It may be that he almost tipped his hand when he lavished food and drink on Benjamin! The Scripture tells us: *“Joseph hurried out for [s]he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, “[t]Serve the meal.” 32 So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is [u]loathsome to the Egyptians. 33 Now they [v]were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. 34 He took portions to them from [w]his own table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.” (Genesis 43:30-34 NASB) It was beneath such a high official to weep openly, but Joseph could hardly control himself. How very sweet it is to see one lost to you for a time and then be re united. I can only imagine the reunions in heaven!*

Perhaps Joseph could not control himself in his desire for revenge. Perhaps God used Joseph’s strong emotions, and righteous anger at being sold into slavery for a good end. Regardless of the reason, Joseph sets up his younger brother Benjamin as a “thief”, knowing that this brother is the one dearest to his father Jacob’s heart: *“14 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. 15 Joseph said to them, “What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?” 16 So Judah said, “What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s slaves, both we and the one in whose [c]possession the cup has been found.” 17 But he said, “Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose [d]possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.” (Genesis 44:14-17). Since Benjamin had the cup which was “stolen”, he was to remain in Egypt as Joseph’s “slave”.*

Judah, who had pledged to protect Benjamin, the eloquently pleads with Joseph to allow Benjamin to return with them. The devastation to Jacob would be overwhelming. Joseph clearly sees the remorse and sorrow of his brothers for the

evil they did to him so many years ago. His heart must have been touched, especially when considering his father Jacob's sorrow: *"Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since [i]his life is bound up in the lad's life, 31 when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. 32 For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then [j]let me bear the blame before my father forever.' 33 Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. 34 For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would [k]overtake my father?"* (Genesis 44:30-34 NASB)

Then the reveal and reunion takes place. Joseph is consumed with the desire to see his father Jacob, and to enjoy the company of his brothers. He reveals himself to them, and they are understandable surprised and overwhelmed with emotion. How would Joseph treat them? He now had almost limitless power and could certainly punish them and exact some revenge for his mistreatment. Yet "the Lord was with Joseph", and Joseph gave credit to God for everything that had happened- his elevation to a position of power, his placement such that lives could be saved, his gifts of discernment and interpretation of dreams, and his pioneering a place for his family and his people to live. Later, as we see in Exodus, when the Pharaohs "did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8 NASB), the people of Israel would find themselves in difficult straits. This was all in God's plan for His people! We read: *"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come [c]closer to me.' And they came [d]closer. And he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 Now do not be grieved or angry [e]with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.'"* (Genesis 45:4-5 NASB)



Joseph Weeps by Owen Jones ([Owen Jones](http://www.gallery.oldbookart.com/main.php?g2_itemId=30588) - http://www.gallery.oldbookart.com/main.php?g2_itemId=30588)

Happy endings abounded! Pharaoh was pleased to learn of Joseph's brothers, and encouraged them to move to Egypt: *"Now when the [h]news was heard in Pharaoh's house [i]that Joseph's brothers had come, it [j]pleased Pharaoh and his servants. 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and [k]go to the land of Canaan, 18 and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the [l]best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.' 19 Now you are ordered, 'Do this: [m]take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. 20 Do not [n]concern yourselves with your goods, for the [o]best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"* (Genesis 45:16-20 NASB)

Jacob hears the amazing news, and is determined to reunite with Joseph before he leaves the earth: *"So he sent his brothers away, and [u]as they departed, he said to them, 'Do not [v]quarrel on the journey.' 25 Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. 26 They told him, saying, 'Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.' But [w]he was stunned, for he did not believe them. 27 When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Then Israel said, 'It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'"* (Genesis 45:24-28 NASB)

January 16, 2019 Genesis 46-48

Reunion- what a delightful thing for a family to experience. Time, distance, and sometimes emotional issues separate the family- which was designed by God as the basic unit of the human family. When reunion occurs it is almost always a joyful and exciting time. This was certainly the case for Joseph's family, as his father rejoined his son in Egypt: *"Joseph [w]prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared [x]before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. 30 Then Israel said to Joseph, 'Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive.'"* (Genesis 46:29-30 NASB)

Seventy family members reunited- their names are listed in this chapter of Genesis. The first hint of the split that was to occur between the people of Egypt and Jacob's family and descendants was the rejection of the occupation of these nomadic people. They were instructed by Joseph to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds- a profession that was "despised" by Egyptians. Ellicott's commentary in Bible hub sheds some light on this enmity: For every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.—This is probably a remark of the narrator, and it is confirmed by the monuments, which generally represent shepherds as unshaven and ill-dressed. Necessarily the Egyptians had sheep and cattle (Genesis 47:16-17), and even Pharaoh had herds (Genesis 47:6); but the care of them was probably left by the peasantry to the women and children, while the men busied themselves with the cultivation of their fields. We need not go far to seek for the cause of this dislike. The word "abomination," first of all, suggests a religious ground of difference; and

not only did shepherds probably kill animals worshipped in different Egyptian districts, but their religion generally was diverse from that of the fixed population. But next, men who lead a settled life always dislike wandering clans, whose cattle are too likely to prey upon their enclosed land (see Note on Genesis 4:8), and who, moving from place to place, are usually not very scrupulous as to the rights of property. Such nomades, too, are generally lower in civilisation, and more rude and rough, than men who have fixed homes. The subjugation of Egypt by the Hyksos was possibly subsequent to the era of Joseph; but we now know from Egyptian sources that there was perpetual war between Egypt and the Hittites, and probably raids were often made upon the rich fields on the banks of the Nile by other Semitic tribes dwelling upon its eastern frontier; and as all these were regarded as shepherds, there was ground enough for the dislike of all nomades as a class, even though the Egyptians did not disdain to have cattle themselves. But as the land in the Nile Valley was arable, the cattle kept would only be such as were useful for agriculture, whereas they formed the main wealth of the Israelites.

(<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/46-34.htm>)

Modern America has certainly seen the phenomenon of a despised people. The African slaves imported to do the “dirty work” on plantations in the South were expected to live separately and were generally despised as “inferior”. Many of the folk songs and spirituals of the African Americans reflect an identity with the “despised” Hebrew people- especially when the Hebrews were enslaved by the Egyptians. They too wished for deliverance!

The Hebrews were told that they must live separately from the Egyptians in the land of Goshen: *“When Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ 34 you shall say, ‘Your servants have been [z]keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,’ that you may [aa]live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is [ab]loathsome to the Egyptians.”* (Genesis 46:33-34 NASB)



The land of Goshen (<http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/goshen.htm>)

Jacob then appears before Pharaoh, and when asked his age gives this memorable account: *“Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and [g]presented him to Pharaoh;*

and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many [h]years have you lived?" 9 So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The [i]years of my sojourning are one hundred and [j]thirty; few and [k]unpleasant have been the [l]years of my life, nor have they [m]attained the [n]years [o]that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning." 10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from [p]his presence." (Genesis 47:7-10)

Jacob viewed his life, as well as the life of others, as a "sojourn". This word is not frequently used in modern everyday English- it means (as a noun) a short or temporary stay; and (as a verb) to stay somewhere temporarily. Jacob clearly saw this life as a brief journey, a temporary visiting place in the scheme of eternity! Good perspective!! He also blessed the Pharaoh- something I missed in my readings through genesis- it is mentioned twice in this passage.

The famine was still intense, and Joseph devised a scheme in which the Egyptian people could sell their land to Pharaoh in exchange for grain: *"When that year was ended, they came to him the [ac]next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the [ad]cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left [ae]for my lord except our bodies and our lands. 19 Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for [af]food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."*

20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for [ag]every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh's. 21 As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they [ah]lived off the allotment which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land. 23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, here is seed for you, and you may sow the land. 24 [ai]At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and [aj]four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones." 25 So they said, "You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's slaves." 26 Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt valid to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests [ak]did not become Pharaoh's." (Genesis 47:18-26 NASB)

Jacob- the "sojourner"- realized that his years on the earth were coming to a close. He lived, according to the Biblical record, one hundred forty seven years- the last seventeen in Egypt/Goshen: *"Now Israel [al]lived in the land of Egypt, in [am]Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. 28 Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the [an]length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years.*

29 When [ao]the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and [ap]faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and

bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." 31 He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed." (Genesis 47:27-31 NASB)

Jacob, nearing death, then blesses Joseph's sons born to him in Egypt- Manessah and Ephriam. IN a surprising move, Jacob blesse Ephriam, the younger brother, with his right hand and Manessah with his left. This is another of the "God surprises" in the narrative- Jacob himself cheated Isaac out of his older brother Esau's blessing- illustrating that the plans and expectations of mankind don't always match with God's. His way is always better! We read: *"When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his [s]descendants shall become a [t]multitude of nations." 20 He blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'"*

Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 I give you one [u]portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow." (Genesis 48:17-22 NASB) The last phrase- with my sword and bow- may be an illusion to the revenge that Jacob's sons took on the Canaanites after their rape of Dinah. Bible Hub has an elegant commentary on this somewhat puzzling verse (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/48-22.htm>)

January 17, 2019 Genesis 49-50 Exodus 1

We then come to the blessing of the sons by Jacob/Israel. The words used are strangely dark and foreboding. Each son receives a blessing and a prophesy, reflecting the father Jacob's understanding of them. Since I am named Daniel, I have always paid particular attention to Daniel's blessing:

"Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;

And listen to Israel your father.

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn;

My might and the beginning of my strength,

[b]Preeminent in dignity and [c]preeminent in power.

4 "[d]Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,

Because you went up to your father's bed;

Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch.

5 *"Simeon and Levi are brothers;
Their swords are implements of violence.
6 "Let my soul not enter into their council;
Let not my glory be united with their assembly;
Because in their anger they slew [e]men,
And in their self-will they lamed [f]oxen.
7 "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel.
I will [g]disperse them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.*

8 *"Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's sons shall bow down to you.
9 "Judah is a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He [h]couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a [i]lion, who [j]dares rouse him up?
10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
[k]Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
11 "[l]He ties his foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.
12 "His eyes are [m]dull from wine,
And his teeth [n]white from milk.*

13 *"Zebulun will dwell at the seashore;
And he shall be [o]a haven for ships,
And his flank shall be toward Sidon.*

14 *"Issachar is [p]a strong donkey,
Lying down between the [q]sheepfolds.*

15 *"When he saw that a resting place was good
And that the land was pleasant,
He bowed his shoulder to bear burdens,
And became a slave at forced labor.*

16 *"Dan shall judge his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.*

17 *"Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A horned snake in the path,
That bites the horse's heels,
So that his rider falls backward.*

18 *"For Your salvation I wait, O Lord.*

19 *"As for Gad, [r]aiders shall raid him,
But he will raid at their [s]heels.*

20 *"[t]As for Asher, his [u]food shall be [v]rich,
And he will yield royal dainties.*

21 *"Naphtali is a doe let loose,
He gives beautiful words.*

22 *"Joseph is a fruitful [w]bough,
A fruitful [x]bough by a spring;*

Its [y]branches run over a wall.

23 "The archers bitterly attacked him,
And shot at him and harassed him;

24 But his bow remained [z]firm,
And [aa]his arms were agile,
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

25 From the God of your father who helps you,
And [ab]by the [ac]Almighty who blesses you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

26 "The blessings of your father
Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the [ad]utmost bound of the everlasting hills;
May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

27 "Benjamin is a [ae]ravenous wolf;
In the morning he devours the prey,
And in the evening he divides the spoil." (Genesis 49:2-27 NASB)

Remember Judah's sin against his father? It was forgiven (and not mentioned) but Reuben's (Genesis 35:22) was...the difference was repentance! Judah repented and Reuben did not. (<https://thetorah.com/did-reuben-lie-with-bilhah/>) The "scepter" is prophesied never to depart from Judah's line- the line of descent of Jesus! (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2691/jewish/Righteous-Individual-vs-Righteous-Leader.htm) Reuben being the firstborn by rights should have received the greater blessing, but did not.

Having discharged his blessings and completed his long (147 years Genesis 47:28) life, and was "gathered to his people": *"Then he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah,*

which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a [ah]burial site. 31 There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah— 32 the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.” 33 When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.” (Genesis 49:29-33 NASB)

Jacob is embalmed among great mourning by both his family and the Egyptian people. Since he made Joseph swear to bury him in Canaan, Joseph asked for and got permission from the Pharaoh to carry his mummified remains to Canaan. *“So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. 9 There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. 10 When they came to the [f]threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and [g]sorrowful lamentation; and he [h]observed seven days mourning for his father. 11 Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at [i]the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a [j]grievous [k]mourning for the Egyptians.” Therefore it was named [l]Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.” (Genesis 50:7-11 NASB)*

The burial site had been purchased much earlier by Abraham: *“Thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; 13 for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a [m]burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.” (Genesis 50:12-14 NASB)*

What follows is (to me) one of the most memorable scenes and insights in Genesis—the forgiving spirit of Joseph, and the realization by Joseph that all things that had happened to him were the acts of a kind and loving God. We read in Romans 8: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[a] have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 NIV)* Joseph lived out this verse! When his brothers, realizing their father was no longer a restraining influence on Joseph, was gone— they feared his revenge and retribution. Joseph’s reply to them and his kind word reveal a great work of God in his life: *“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!” 16 So they [n]sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father charged before he died, saying, 17 ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph, “Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” 19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about [o]this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your*

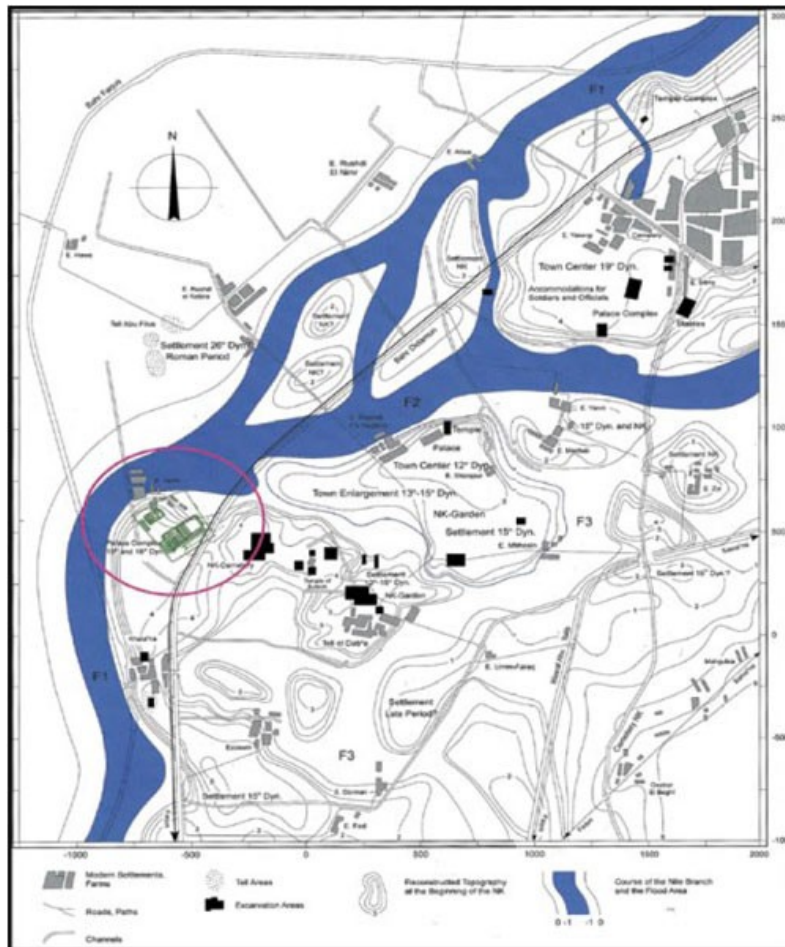
little ones." So he comforted them and spoke [p]kindly to them." (Genesis 50:15-21 NASB).

Instead of retribution and revenge- forgiveness; instead of hatred- kindness and compassion. Instead of grudge bearing and harboring of past wounds- a life that reflected and illustrated God's amazing love and kindness. Joseph's kindness to his brothers clearly illustrates God's amazing kindness and forgiveness of us! Joseph lived to the age of 110, saw his grandchildren , and -like Jacob/Israel- was embalmed according to the practice of the Egyptians: *" Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. 23 Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. 24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely [q]take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He [r]promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely [s]take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." 26 So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and [t]he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.* (Genesis 50:22-26 NASB)

How long did it take for a good relationship to turn bad, for the relatively accepting Egypt to fear and enslave the Hebrew people? The historicity of God's people dwelling in Egypt, and ultimately becoming enslaved and then delivered by God through Moses, is surprisingly controversial

(<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/10/19/Recent-Research-on-the-Date-and-Setting-of-the-Exodus.aspx>) Archaeology suggests that the Israelites were delivered from slavery during the reign of Ramses II, but there are disputes and competing theories about the historicity of these events.

The Scripture suggests that the reason the Egyptians turned on the Hebrew people was their sheer numbers- the Hebrews multiplied almost explosively, and the Egyptians feared their sheer numbers: *" Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are [f]more and mightier than we. 10 Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and [g]in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and [h]depart from the land." 11 So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with [i]hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they [j]spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. 13 The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; 14 and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously [k]imposed on them."* (Exodus 1:8-13 NASB). Was the new king Rameses I? Exodus 1:11 suggests that the storage cities of Pithon and Ramses were built at the time of the "new king/pharaoh".



Map of the excavation area at Rameses

(<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/10/19/Recent-Research-on-the-Date-and-Setting-of-the-Exodus.aspx>)

God did not forget His promise to His people, and moved in the hearts of the midwives to spare the Hebrew children. The command to cast the newborns into the Nile was used by God to protect the leader of the Hebrew people, Moses: *"But the midwives [n]feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had [o]commanded them, but let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife [p]can get to them." 20 So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very [q]mighty. 21 Because the midwives [r]feared God, He [s]established [t]households for them. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born [u]you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."* (Exodus 1: 17-22 NASB)

I am certain God did not become offended by the "lies" told by the midwives, and instead blessed the faithful midwives!

January 18, 2019 Exodus 2-4

God can use anyone, or anything, to accomplish His good purposes. Joseph attested to this when he forgave his brothers (Gen 50:20). The evil intention of the Pharaoh in killing male children led the parents of Moses- from the tribe of Levi- to hide their baby in a waterproof basket in the river. Pharaoh's daughter, when bathing in the same river, heard the cry, had pity on the helpless child, and adopted him. Thus Moses was put in the very family of the Pharaoh- and was in position to lead his people to freedom: *"Now a man from the house of Levi went and [a]married a daughter of Levi. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw [b]that he was [c]beautiful, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a [d]wicker [e]basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. 4 His sister stood at a distance to [f]find out what would [g]happen to him.*

5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the [h]basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. 6 When she opened it, she [i]saw the child, and behold, the [j]boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call [k]a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" 8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go ahead." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him [l]Moses, and said, "Because I [m]drew him out of the water." (Exodus 2:1-10 NASB). Just as Joseph was put in the very top of the Egyptian power structure, so was Moses! Ultimately God would make the tribe of Levi, from which Moses and his brother Aaron came, to be the priestly tribe- those charged with preserving and keeping God's law.

Can God use a murderer, one who has fled judgment- an outlaw- to accomplish His purpose? Apparently so...Moses murdered an Egyptian and fled from judgment to Midian: *"But he said, "Who made you a [r]prince or a judge over us? Are you [s]intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the matter has become known." (Exodus 2:14 NASB)* So Moses fled to Midian, found God's people there (see the description of the Midianites in this useful reference: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Midianites.html>) , and married and had a son. Pharaoh, who meant to kill Moses for his crime of murder, died, and Moses could now return to Egypt. We see the same pattern later as Jesus' family fled the evil Herod, and could return from Egypt after the evil ruler died (Matthew 2:13-23).

God then heard the "groans" of His people and remembered his covenant with Abraham- the stage was now set for the deliverance from slavery: *"Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of*

Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. 24 So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God saw the sons of Israel, and God [x]took notice of them.” (Exodus 2:23-25 NASB)

Did God, who knows and understands everything, need a “reminder” that His people were suffering. Had He not heard their cries in bondage before? Did He wait until His children were at the breaking point to rescue them? We certainly don’t believe this about God! One of the mysteries of the baffling thing we call “life” is God’s permissive will. For reasons that perhaps on God knows or understands, He allows sinful men to express the consequences of their sin- the suffering and grief of oppression in this case. We must remember, though, that He is a “present help in time of trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Matthew Henry’s commentary on these verses is helpful: “The Israelites’ bondage in Egypt continued, though the murdering of their infants did not continue. Sometimes the Lord suffers the rod of the wicked to lie very long and very heavy on the lot of the righteous. At last they began to think of God under their troubles. It is a sign that the Lord is coming towards us with deliverance, when he inclines and enables us to cry to him for it. God heard their groaning; he made it to appear that he took notice of their complaints. He remembered his covenant, of which he is ever mindful. He considered this, and not any merit of theirs. He looked upon the children of Israel. Moses looked upon them, and pitied them; but now God looked upon them, and helped them. He had respect unto them. His eyes are now fixed upon Israel, to show himself in their behalf. God is ever thus, a very present help in trouble. Take courage then, ye who, conscious of guilt and thralldom, are looking to Him for deliverance. God in Christ Jesus is also looking upon you. A call of love is joined with a promise of the Redeemer. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Mt 11:28.” (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/2-24.htm>)

Moses is then commissioned by God in a dramatic and unforgettable way- through a “burning bush”. God tells Moses that He is the “I Am”- the Hebrew word means not only I am (present) but that I am (eternally) present- I am the God who “Is and was and ever more shall be” (paraphrase from the hymn Holy, Holy, Holy <https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/holy-holy-holy-lord-god-almighty/>) These are the “creds” that Moses needs not only for Moses’s people but for the Pharaoh. Moses must be convinced clearly of his calling from God! The Scripture says: “*Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the [a]west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of [b]a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, “[c]I must turn aside now and see this [d]marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6 He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God*

of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” (Exodus 3:1-6 NASB)

God then promises to free His people, and even to change the hearts of the Egyptian captors so that they will freely give the former slaves gold and silver articles-part of the future basis of their earthly wealth: *“Then Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “[g]I AM WHO [h]I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘[i]I AM has sent me to you.’” 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name [j]to all generations. 16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “[k]I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ 18 They will [l]pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’ 19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except [m]under compulsion. 20 So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. 21 I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. 22 But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians.” (Exodus 3:13-22 NASB)*



Image: KEVIN CARDEN / LIGHTSTOCK.COM

Is there anything God will not provide? What a mighty and incredible God we love and serve! Moses was then given powers- powers that were later “counterfeited” by the Egyptian “magicians”. We must realize that Satan- the angel of light- is a master of disguise and can counterfeit the miracles of God. Satan, however, is very limited, as evidenced by the inability of the Egyptian “magicians” to perform the mighty acts that Moses.

Moses, as we often do, tests God and needs to be shown several powers that God has given him- the ability to convert a staff to a snake (Exodus 4:2-5) or to cause and cure leprosy at will (Exodus 4:6-7) or even turn the Nile to blood (Exodus 4:8). Moses then argues with God and looks for an “excuse”. Moses tells God that he is not eloquent-an argument that does not impress God since God himself made Moses- including his “non-eloquent” mouth. God then gives Moses an out- his brother Aaron can be the “spokesperson”: *“Then Moses said to the Lord, “Please, Lord, I have never been [f]eloquent, neither [g]recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am [h]slow of speech and [i]slow of tongue.” 11 The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” 13 But he said, “Please, Lord, now [j]send the message by whomever You will.” 14 Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, “Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that [k]he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. 16 Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. 17 You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.” (Exodus 4:10-17 NASB)* Even though God is angry with Moses for his unwillingness, God equips him and sets Moses on his mission of deliverance.

The horrible plague of the angel of death- the last plague on Egypt- is seen in the next passage: *"The Lord said to Moses, "When you go [n]back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your [o]power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. 23 So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'""* (Exodus 4:21-23 NASB)

Moses then seeks approval from Jethro to leave for Egypt, taking his wife (Jethro's daughter) with him. Then we have a dramatic scene that shows us how serious God is about His covenantal requirements- the requirement of circumcision. Moses wife Zipporah angrily reminds Moses that his son has not been circumcised- and apparently God was ready to end Moses' life before he accomplished the mission of deliverance God has set him on. Do we believe God could raise up another to accomplish His purposes?- clearly, yes! Yet this tumultuous scene reminds us of the seriousness of God's holiness: *"Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and [p]threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." 26 So He let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood"—[q]because of the circumcision."* (Exodus 4:24-26 NASB)

Moses meets Aaron, and the two convince the elders of the Hebrews that they are legitimately called by God to lead their people. At last, hope has entered the lives of the myriad souls in bondage...the end of their suffering in slavery is near- and God has accomplished this! *"Now the Lord said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; 30 and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. 31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord [r]was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped."* (Exodus 4:27-31 NASB)

January 19, 2019 Exodus 5-7

"The best laid plans of mice and men..." so reads the famous quote from Robert Burns. Moses pleads for the first time with the Pharaoh to allow the Hebrew people to worship and make sacrifices- Pharaoh only sees this as an excuse to avoid work- and makes the burden on the people greater by requiring them to find straw for the bricks they are making. The straw added strength to the bricks and prevented crumbling (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bricks_without_straw)



illustrators of the 1728 *Figures de la Bible*, Gerard Hoet (1648–1733) and others

So the burden on the people increased: *“So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, 7 “You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, ‘[d]Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words.”*

10 So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I am not going to give you any straw. 11 You go and get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it, but none of your labor will be reduced.’” 12 So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters pressed them, saying, “Complete your [e]work quota, [f]your daily amount, just as when [g]you had straw.” 14 Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten [h]and were asked, “Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?” (Exodus 5:6-14 NASB)

Moses understandably doubts the mission he was put on by God, since his first try at helping his people caused their burdens to increase: *“Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? 23 Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done*

harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all.” (Exodus 5:22-23)

God- ever faithful- the covenant maker_ promises that He will save the people “with an outstretched hand”. The people, however, were not inclined to listen since they were mired in still further misery: “ *Then the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for [a]under compulsion he will let them go, and [b]under compulsion he will drive them out of his land.”*

2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord; 3 and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as [c]God Almighty, but by My name, [d]Lord, I did not make Myself known to them. 4 I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the [e]land in which they sojourned. 5 Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. 6 Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 Then I will take you [f]for My people, and I will be [g]your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 I will bring you to the land which I [h]swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord.’” 9 So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their [i]despondency and cruel bondage.” (Exodus 6:1-9 NASB)

Moses again argues with God, thinking that his “unskilled speech” is responsible for the failure to deliver the people from slavery. He, like myself, so often relies on the energy, strength, talent and insight that I naturally possess to accomplish God’s purpose, and am surprised (amazingly but constantly) that it is not MY strength, power, influence, or talent that makes any difference. Only as God uses me can I accomplish anything- through Him (Philippians 4:13)



The Scripture records that Moses still insisted to God that it is his own “unskilled speech” that is responsible for this early failure. How God must have wondered how long He would have to teach Moses to rely upon Him alone!: *28 Now it came about on the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, 29 that the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “I am the Lord; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you.” 30 But Moses said before the Lord, “Behold, I am [w]unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?”* (Exodus 6:28-30 NASB)

God again promises that He will deliver the people, and that Moses will seem “like a god” to Pharaoh and Aaron “his prophet”. God also warns Moses that he will “harden the heart” of Pharaoh in the process. God knew exactly what it would take- including the “breaking point” of Pharaoh- for His will to be accomplished: *“Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2 You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. 3 But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.” 6 So Moses and Aaron did it; as the Lord commanded them, thus they did. 7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron [a]eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.”* (Exodus 7:1-7 NASB)

The Scripture plainly states that Moses was 80 and Aaron 83 when these events took place- reminding me that the age of the obedient servant is not a factor to God! Sometimes the twenty-somethings that I teach in college must wonder how an “old guy” could possibly still function, much less have the acuity to teach chemistry! Age doesn’t really matter that much in some undertakings...!

God knew Pharaoh would demand a “sign” or “miracle” to exhibit his authority and power, just as so many demanded Jesus show His divine power later in history. Moses shows his ability (given by God!) to turn a staff into a snake, but the “magicians” could duplicate this feat. Even when Moses’ snake ate the magicians’ snakes, his heart was still hardened, just as God had predicted. It would take more than one demonstration of power to convince the Pharaoh! *” Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 9 “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘[b]Work a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’” 10 So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the Lord had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and [c]his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the [d]magicians of Egypt, did [e]the same with their secret arts. 12 For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Yet Pharaoh’s heart was [f]hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”* (Exodus 7:8-13 NASB) The magicians, working their “secret arts” were tapping into the power of Satan/evil to “counterfeit” God’s miracles- but this power is clearly shown to be inferior to that of God.

Even the conversion of the life-giving Nile water to blood did not convince the Pharaoh, for his “magicians” were able to duplicate this feat. Pharaoh was still unconvinced! *“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is [g]stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning [h]as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. 16 You shall say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.” 17 Thus says the Lord, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, I will strike [i]the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood. 18 The fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will [j]become foul, and the Egyptians will [k]find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.”” 19 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their [l]streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.””*

20 So Moses and Aaron did even as the Lord had commanded. And he lifted up [m]the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood. 21 The fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile [n]became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. 22 But the [o]magicians of Egypt did [p]the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh’s heart was [q]hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said. 23 Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house [r]with no concern even for this. 24 So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they

could not drink of the water of the Nile. 25 Seven days [s]passed after the Lord had struck the Nile.” (Exodus 7:14-25 NASB)



Moses and Aaron by the river of blood, Add.27210, f.11

(<https://www.bl.uk/learning/cult/inside/goldhaggadahstories/mosesstory/moses.html>)

The “scientific” explanation of this and the other plagues ranges from “global warming” and subsequent excess growth of toxic algae and microorganisms (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/7530678/Biblical-plagues-really-happened-say-scientists.html>) to “red tide” (<https://www.livescience.com/58638-science-of-the-10-plagues.html>).

What is important to realize is that God, who is the Creator and who knows the natural world at a level and scope unimaginable by us humans, was able to accomplish these miraculous events for His purposes!

January 20, 2019 Exodus 8-10

When I was a “young” Assistant Professor (later I would be the “world’s oldest Assistant professor at 68) at Illinois State University in the late 70’s, a colleague of mine told me a story I have remembered vividly. A Chinese biology graduate student was tasked with preparing frogs for dissection for an undergraduate lab. He was totally repulsed by these creatures, and finally told his major professor “I cannot make it with these frogs!”. The repulsion of just a few frogs was multiplied almost to infinity as Moses (and then the magicians) caused a “sea” of frogs to rise up from the waters and cover the land: *[a]Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 2 But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. 3 The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your*

house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. 4 So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.”” 5 [b]Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the [c]streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’” 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the [d]frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7 The [e]magicians did [f]the same with their secret arts, [g]making frogs come up on the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 8:1-7 NASB)

If the Pharaoh would let the people go, then the frogs would be removed from the land. Pharaoh seems to “crack” as a result of this plague, and promises to let the people go if only Moses will remove the frogs. Moses asks God for this additional miracle, the frogs die (and smell horrible) but Pharaoh’s heart is again hardened: “8 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Entreat the Lord that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Lord.” 9 Moses said to Pharaoh, “[h]The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be [i]destroyed from you and your houses, that they may be left only in the Nile?”

10 Then he said, “Tomorrow.” So he said, “May it be according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. 11 The frogs will depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they will be left only in the Nile.” 12 Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the Lord concerning the frogs which He had [j]inflicted upon Pharaoh. 13 The Lord did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. 14 So they piled them in heaps, and the land [k]became foul. 15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he [l]hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.” (Exodus 8:8-15 NASB)

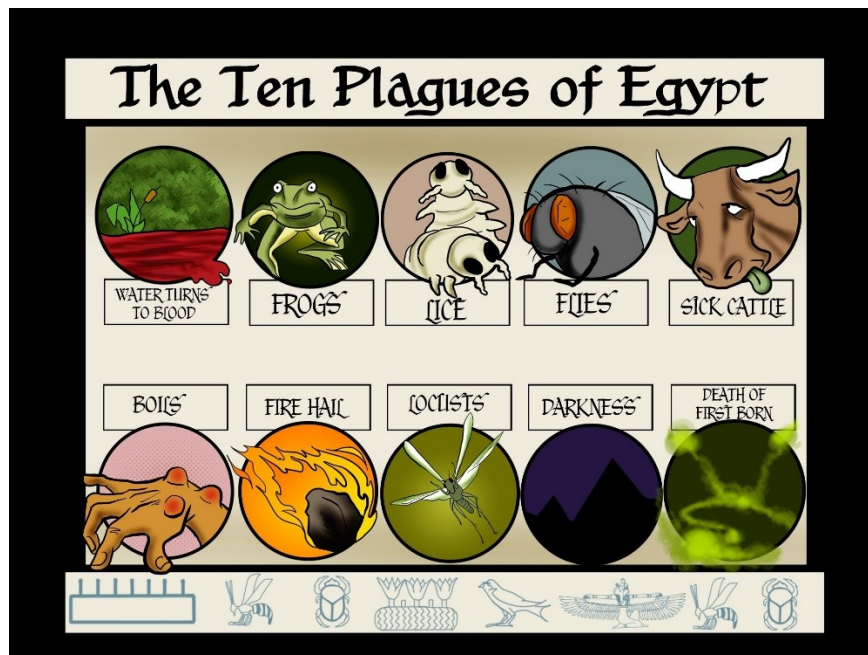
A plague of gnats followed, and this time the “magicians” could not duplicate this miracle. The magicians told the Pharaoh that this plague was “the finger of God”- they at least were finally convinced that the true God of the universe was acting on Moses (and the people’s) behalf: “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become [m]gnats through all the land of Egypt.’” 17 They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were [n]gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became [o]gnats through all the land of Egypt. 18 The [p]magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth [q]gnats, but they could not; so there were [r]gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the [s]magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was [t]hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.” (Exodus 8:16-19 NASB)

A plague of flies had the same result- Pharaoh initially agreed to Moses’ demands, but when the flies were removed, he changed his mind and “hardened his heart” : “So Moses went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the Lord. 31 The Lord did [ac]as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his

servants and from his people; not one remained. 32 But Pharaoh [ad]hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.” (Exodus 8:30-32 NASB)

In Exodus chapter 9 we see the sequence of three more plagues: the death of (only the Egyptian) cattle, the plague of boils (so awful that the magicians “could not stand” before the Pharaoh), and hail which destroyed the crops that were budding). The result each time was that the Pharaoh “sinned” by hardening his heart: *“But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the [ad]thunder had ceased, he sinned again and [ae]hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35 Pharaoh’s heart was [af]hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.” (Exodus 9:34-35 NASB)* I am reminded of the temptations of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus had fasted for forty days, and Satan offered Him several temptations, two of which (turning stones to bread and leaping from the temple spire and landing unharmed) would transform Jesus into a “miracle maker”, and not a servant (Luke 4:1-15; Matthew 4:1-11). One commentary sums it up well for me: “Jesus had been sent to earth as a man--not a superman. He had come to take the form of a servant, not to use his godly abilities to bend the laws of nature and serve himself. If you look throughout the Gospels, every miracle of Jesus is aimed at bringing honor to his Father and to validate his ministry. Turning stones into bread would have been disobedient to God the Father, and it would have been a frivolous use of his abilities. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. That is why he says he does not live “by bread alone.” He lives--and we live--by being obedient to God.” (<https://patch.com/illinois/plainfield/why-didnt-jesus-turn-those-stones-into-bread>) The miracles themselves are not the point- the authority of God is! Pharaoh had to be touched “where he really lived” and lose a child before God was able to touch his heart and cause him to finally let the people of God leave Egypt!

Chapter 10 of Exodus follows the same pattern- the plagues of locusts and darkness only resulted in Pharaoh’s heart being hardened. Pharaoh seems to be tiring of this seemingly endless cycle of plague and removal, for he angrily tells Moses: *“But the Lord [u]hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me! [v]Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!” 29 Moses said, “You are right; I shall never see your face again!” (Exodus 10:27-29 NASB).* We will see this “darkness” again as God’s people escape from Egypt, and the darkness prevents the pursuing army of Pharaoh from reaching them (Exodus 14:19-20)



January 21, 2019 Exodus 11-13

The last -and worst- plague was still to come. This is the plague that finally reached Pharaoh and convinced him that the people and the God he opposed were truly powerful. The firstborn of each family- and each of the livestock- were to die and the hands of a death angel: *"Now the Lord had said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely. 2 Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold." 3 (The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and by the people.) 4 So Moses said, "This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. 5 Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. 6 There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. 7 But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal.' Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. 8 All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, 'Go, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will leave." Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh."* (Exodus 11:1-8 NIV)

The deliverance of the Hebrew people by the mighty hand of their God was an event to be remembered, memorialized, and even rehearsed through the ceremony of the celebration of the Passover. In the Passover experience we also see clearly the prophetic symbols of the Messiah to come. The blood of a lamb is to be smeared on the doorposts of the house so that the inhabitants will be spared death. The Paschal (sacrificial) lamb's blood covered -protected_ the inhabitants (see <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2009/09/covered-with-blood.html>).



The Hebrew people are to remember this defining event by eating a lamb each year at the (new) beginning of their calendar year: *“Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of [a]Egypt, 2 “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a [b]lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a [c]lamb for [d]each household. 4 Now if the household is too small for a [e]lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the [f]number of persons in them; according to [g]what each man should eat, you are to [h]divide the lamb. 5 Your [i]lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 [j]You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it [k]at twilight. 7 Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel [l]of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread [m]and bitter herbs. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. 10 And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. 11 Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the Lord’s Passover. 12 For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the Lord. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you [n]live; and when I see the blood I will pass over*

you, and no plague will befall you [o]to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”
(Exodus 12:1-13 NASB)

The bread “made in haste” that was unleavened, is to be eaten as part of the ceremonial remembrance of this great deliverance. The Hebrews therefore will remind themselves once a year of the power of God to deliver them from the plague as well as from bondage. This is exactly what the sacrifice of the Lamb of God does for each of us who accept, love and place Him in the center of our hearts! The details are given: *“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall [q]remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that [r]person shall be cut off from Israel. 16 On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten [s]by every person, that alone may be [t]prepared by you. 17 You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a [u]permanent ordinance. 18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 19 Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that [v]person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land. 20 You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”*
(Exodus 12:15-20 NASB)

A very touching part of the Passover meal is the question asked by a child “Why is tonight not like all other nights?” The question is to be asked and answered with the story of God’s great deliverance on that night in history. It is an event so important to the understanding of God and His deliverance that this is to be a “permanent” ordinance: *“For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. 24 And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25 When you enter the land which the Lord will give you, as He has [z]promised, you shall observe this [aa]rite. 26 And when your children say to you, ‘[ab]What does this rite mean to you?’ 27 you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord [ac]who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but [ad]spared our homes.’”* And the people bowed low and worshiped.”
(Exodus 12:23-27 NASB)

God, the covenant Keeper, did exactly as He had promised- the destroying angel brought death to the firstborn of each household not “covered in the blood of the lamb” : *“Now it came about at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. 30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. 31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, “Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, [ae]worship the Lord, as you*

have said. 32 Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also." (Exodus 12:29-32 NASB) The Hebrew people were now seen by the Egyptians as "bringers of death" and were told to leave- the Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in the night- not waiting for another day to begin! It is interesting to me that the Pharaoh also asks Moses and Aaron to "bless him"- was the previously hard heart of Pharaoh softened by this display of God's Power?

Later in history we see the death of children accompanying the coming of Jesus- the slaughter of the innocents by the insanely jealous (and insane) Herod. The Wikipedia article offers an interesting commentary on the event- recorded only in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 2): "Classical historian Michael Grant, for instance, stated "The tale is not history but myth or folk-lore". It appears to be modeled on Pharaoh's attempt to kill the Israelite children (Exodus 1:22), and more specifically on various elaborations of the original story that had become current in the 1st century. In that expanded story, Pharaoh kills the Hebrew children after his scribes warn him of the impending birth of the threat to his crown (i.e., Moses), but Moses's father and mother are warned in a dream that the child's life is in danger and act to save him, and Moses, like Jesus, returns only when those who sought his death are themselves dead. The story of the massacre of the innocents thus plays a part in Matthew's wider nativity story, in which the proclamation of the coming of the Messiah (the birth) is followed by his rejection by the Jews (Herod and his scribes and the people of Jerusalem) and acceptance by the gentiles (the Magi). The relevance of Jeremiah 31:15 to the massacre in Bethlehem is not immediately apparent, as Jeremiah's next verses go on to speak of hope and restoration." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massacre_of_the_Innocents)

The people left in haste, taking with them the gold and silver given to them by the Egyptians: *"The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, "We will all be dead."* 34 *So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders.*

35 Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; 36 and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

37 Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. 38 A mixed multitude also went up with them, [af]along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. 39 They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they [ag]prepared any provisions for themselves.

40 Now the time [ah]that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, [ai]to the very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." (Exodus 12:33-41 NASB)

More detail is then given by God as to the observance of the Passover- the lamb is not to have any broken bones- a "type" of Jesus who dies on the cross without His

bones being broken by the Romans: *"It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. 47 All the congregation of Israel are to [an]celebrate this. 48 But if a [ao]stranger sojourns with you, and [ap]celebrates the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to [aq]celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. 49 [ar]The same law shall [as]apply to the native as to the [at]stranger who sojourns among you."*

50 Then all the sons of Israel did so; they did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. 51 And on that same day the Lord brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt [au]by their hosts". (Exodus 12:46-51 NASB).

The firstborn of each family, animal and human, is declared by God to be dedicated to Him. This is a pattern for the sacrificial offerings, in which the "first fruits" are to be offered to God. God deserves our very best. The very famous devotional book by Oswald Chambers has a title that reflects this accurately "Our Utmost for His Highest"! The Scripture says: *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first [a]offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me." (Exodus 13:1-2 NASB)*

This dedication of the first born is a part of the memorialization of God's deliverance: *"Now when the Lord brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, 12 you shall [j]devote to the Lord the first [k]offspring of every womb, and [l]the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the Lord. 13 But every first [m]offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. 14 And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a [n]powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of [o]slavery. 15 It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord the males, the first [p]offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.' 16 So it shall [q]serve as a sign on your hand and as [r]phylacteries [s]on your forehead, for with a [t]powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:11-16 NASB)*

God then leads His people, wisely avoiding the warlike Philistines: *"Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." 18 Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the [u]Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt. 19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely [v]take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you." 20 Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. 21 The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way,*

and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might [w]travel by day and by night. 22 [x]He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.” (Exodus 13:17-22 NASB)

The question each of us must answer is this: When God leads us, will we follow? The answer to that question determines the commitment, joy and victorious living that we will experience. The old hymn states “Where He Leads Me I Will Follow” (E.W Blandy). The author of this tune was a Salvation Army officer: “Blandy, a Salvation Army officer, wrote this song after choosing between a comfortable post at an established church, and an alternate assignment to the New York City waterfront and slum called Hell's Kitchen. He chose the latter.” (https://hymnary.org/text/i_can_hear_my_savior_calling_i_can_hear#authority_media_flexscores).

January 22, 2019 Exodus 14-16

So the Hebrew people, a vast expanse of (estimated) 2 plus million people, finally are given their freedom and leave Egypt. But are they truly safe? From a human point, when Pharaoh again “hardens his heart” (or more correctly, God hardens his heart) and decides to pursue them, what chance of survival do they have. As the army of chariots and officers grows close, the Hebrew people cry out in despair- it would have been better to “serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14:12): *“Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ 4 Thus I will [a]harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” And they did so.*

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, [b]Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” 6 So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; 7 and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 The Lord [c]hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out [d]boldly. 9 Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.” (Exodus 14:1-9 NASB)

It seems God has put His people in a vulnerable spot- right next to the impassible Red Sea- an inescapable place that the Egyptians could use to their advantage! Yet God’s plan was perfect- what seemed an impossible situation and sure defeat was turned into victor. Just as God had provided a lamb for Abraham, He provided and escape for His people camped by the Sea! The Bible tells it this way: *“But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! [h]Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you*

will never see them again forever. 14 The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent."

15 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall [i]go through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 As for Me, behold, I will [j]harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 Then the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen."

19 The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud [k]along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord [l]swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. 22 The sons of Israel [m]went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. 24 At the morning watch, the Lord looked down on the [n]army of the Egyptians [o]through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the [p]army of the Egyptians into confusion. 25 He [q]caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, "Let [r]us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians." (Exodus 14:13-25 NASB)

God was indeed "fighting for them" as He was later to do so with Gideon against the Midianites. One of the most memorable moments in cinematic history was the Cecil B DeMille film "The Ten Commandments" in which Charlton Heston, portraying Moses, holds up his staff over the waters of the sea and proclaims "Behold the mighty hand of God!"



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charlton_Heston_in_The_Ten_Commandments_film_trailer.jpg

When Moses again commanded the divided sea to close over the pursuing Egyptians, drowning them all, the people believed in Moses and the God who commissioned him: *"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing [s]right into it; then the Lord [t]overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, [u]even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. 29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

30 Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 When Israel saw the great [v]power which the Lord had [w]used against the Egyptians, the people [x]feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses." (Exodus 14:26-31 NASB)

This faith and belief in the power of God would not survive the first testing of the people by hardship in the desert! We will see the seemingly endless cycle of hardship and suffering, crying out to God for relief, God granting relief and blessing, and then arrogance and disbelief and disobedience, followed by hardship and suffering. It must have grieved and saddened God (then and now) to see how little the faith of the people – or an individual- seemed to become a central factor in the lives of His people! As Jesus explained later, some seed falls on "rocky soil" does not develop deep roots and withers in the sun. My prayer for myself and for my people is that we are people of "good soil" and that we multiply to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 13:1-23; Matthew 28: 16-20)

Miriam, Moses' sister, then sings a song of victory. The joy that she and her people felt was real and heartfelt. The opportunity of freedom was now a reality. Would they honor God and serve Him gladly? After all, he had just demonstrated for them

the might of His hand! The answer, sadly, is negative. The people were still poisoned with a sin nature, one that would not be “cured” until the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost (Acts 2). Miriam sang: *“Miriam answered them, “Sing to the Lord, for He [n]is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.”* (Exodus 15:21)

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the story of the waters at Marah (Hebrew for “bitter”) changing from “bitter” to “sweet” once Moses puts a tree that God showed him into the water. The scientist in me will explain that the waters that are bitter are alkaline, and that the “tree” contained acids that neutralized the alkalinity of the water and removed its bitterness

(<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/where-the-wood-meets-water/>) The importance of water to those wandering in the wilderness cannot be overstated. The two million plus people were accompanied by probably an equal number of livestock. Imagine the amount of water needed for their survival! God, who invented all the science of the universe, was able to lead Moses to the right tree which would solve the problem of bitterness. Jesus, who called Himself the source of “living water” does the same for us! (John 4:14; 7:38).

The next “need” in the hierarchy of survival is food. Only a limited amount of food could have been taken with the people as they left Egypt. What then were they to do to survive? Once again, God- the Great Provider- has the answer. He will provide manna (from the Hebrew mon-“portion of food”- also from Egyptian- “what”). The Hebrew people may have first said “mon” and meant the Egyptian word (What is this?). God also provided “directions” for collecting the manna- on the sixth day- the day before the Sabbath- twice as much would be collected to be used on the Sabbath and the day before. God was already teaching His people the importance of the Sabbath: *“Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of [a]meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My [b]instruction. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, “At evening [c]you will know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning [d]you will see the glory of the Lord, for He hears your grumblings against the Lord; and what are we, that you grumble against us?” (Exodus 16:1-7 NASB)

God certainly must have a sense of humor- after all, he invented everything and made us in His image. When the people complain that they are tired of manna and want meat, God practically drowns them in meat! The Bible tells us: *“Moses said,*

"This will happen when the Lord gives you [e]meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the Lord hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the Lord."

9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your grumblings.'" 10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they [f]looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. 11 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, '[g]At twilight you shall eat [h]meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

13 So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew [i]evaporated, behold, on the [j]surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. 15 When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "[k]What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. 16 This is [l]what the Lord has commanded, 'Gather of it every man [m]as much as he should eat; you shall take [n]an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.'" 17 The sons of Israel did so, and some gathered much and some little. 18 When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered [o]as much as he should eat. 19 Moses said to them, "Let no man leave any of it until morning." 20 But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them. 21 They gathered it morning by morning, every man [p]as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt." (Exodus 16:8-21 NASB)

God wanted His people to remember- the deliverance and the Passover of the destroying angel, the provision of manna in the wilderness. How often we forget the goodness of God- we become so satisfied with ourselves and take His mercy and grace for granted that we forget the deliverance that God has given each of us who believe through His Son! God wanted His people to remember the manna as a provision and an act of mercy from Himself, so he instructed them to first *rest* on the Sabbath (which we scarcely do today) and to preserve some of the manna as a constant reminder of God's goodness: *"Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 then he said to them, 'This is what the Lord [q]meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over [r]put aside to be kept until morning.'" 24 So they [s]put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be [t]none."*

27 It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My [u]instructions? 29 See, [v]the Lord has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

31 The house of Israel named it [w]manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey. 32 Then Moses said, "This is [x]what the Lord has commanded, 'Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" 33 Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations." 34 As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept. 35 The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. 36 (Now an omer is a tenth of an [y]ephah.)" (Exodus 16:22-36 NASB)

January 23, 2019 Exodus 17-19

"Strike the rock" and water will come gushing forth...the solution God gave Moses at Horeb, and Moses named the place "Massah and Meribah" which means "test and quarrel", because the people were so thirsty that they threatened to stone Moses: "Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by [a]stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the [b]command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and [c]they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill [d]us and [e]our children and [f]our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." 5 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He named the place [g]Massah and [h]Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7 NASB)

The people dealt not only with parching thirst but opposition in battle. They were attacked by the people of Amelek (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amalek>). The founder of this tribe of people was the grandson of Esau. The betrayal of Esau by Jacob has returned full circle as the Amelekites fought with God's people. Only the courageous fighting of Joshua and the intervention of God (as Moses held up his hands) allowed God's people to prevail. This intervention of God was memorialized by an altar, and Moses gave God another of His many names - "The Lord is My

Banner" (Jehovah Nissi): *Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."* 10 Joshua did as Moses [i]told him, [j]and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand [k]down, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. 13 So Joshua [l]overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in [m]a book as a memorial and [n]recite it to Joshua, [o]that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." 15 Moses built an altar and named it *The Lord is My Banner*; 16 and he said, "[p]The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation." Exodus 17:8-16 NASB)



Moses had assumed the role of “judge”- when a dispute arose between the people, Moses would hear the facts of the dispute and render judgment. This must have been overwhelming due to the sheer number of people (two million plus). When Moses visited Jethro, his father-in-law (Zipporah’s father), he received not only a warm reception but some very cogent advice. Moses should appoint “judges” over the people to relieve himself of this burden, and only serve as a sort of “supreme court” in the most difficult or contentious cases: *“So Moses listened [aa]to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 25 Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, [ab]of hundreds, [ac]of fifties and [ad]of tens. 26 They judged the people at all times; the difficult [ae]dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor [af]dispute they themselves*

would judge. 27 Then Moses [ag]bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land." (Exodus 18:24-27 NASB) These judges should be chosen from persons of high moral character: : *"Furthermore, you shall [r]select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, [s]of hundreds, [t]of fifties and [u]of tens."* (Exodus 18:21 NASB) In this patriarchal society, the judges selected would all be men.

God now "sets the stage" for His dramatic encounter with Moses, and the giving of the Law which is to guide God's people. The people should purify themselves, and stay away from the mountain-Sinai- as the power and might of God will be present in a powerful way. The awe and respect that God demanded here has not been relaxed. So often we reduce God and Jesus to "cosmic friends" and lose the "fear of God"- the feeling of astonishment, excitement and respect that is due to the very Creator of all the universe! God's instructions were very specific as he prepared the people- and Moses- for what was to come: *"Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain [g]quaked violently. 19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with [h]thunder. 20 The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go down, [i]warn the people, so that they do not break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them [j]perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, or else the Lord will break out against them." 23 Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You [k]warned us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 Then the Lord said to him, "[l]Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, or He will break forth upon them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them."* (Exodus 19:18-35 NASB)

John Gills' commentary on verse 24 is enlightening..."break forth" implies that God will bring sudden death on those who disrespect and dishonor Him by crossing the barriers around Sinai and approaching the Lord in a disrespectful and disobedient way: *"And the Lord said unto him, away, get thee down,....* And prevent the people and priests from breaking through the bounds and gazing, to which their curiosity would tempt them; as the Lord knew better than Moses, and it was high time for him to be gone, the matter required haste, the people were under great temptations of indulging their curiosity, to the peril of their lives: *and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee;* which is thought to be an answer to the question, who might come up? only himself and Aaron, who was his prophet and spokesman, and concerned with him in his miracles, and in conducting the people of Israel; and who was to be chief priest as Moses was to be, and was the leader and governor of the people: *but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them;* it required the immediate presence of Moses below, and immediate care was to be taken by him, lest the

priests and people, led by a vain curiosity, should attempt to ascend the mount, and come where God was, to see if they could observe any likeness of him; which would so provoke him, that in just retaliation, as they had broke through the bounds set, he would break forth on them by inflicting sudden death upon them." John Gills Exposition of the Whole Bible (<https://www.studylight.org/commentary/exodus/19-24.html>)

January 24, 2019 Exodus 20-22

The laws and commandments of God for His people are now given to Moses. These are not ten "suggestions" for a better morality- these are the moral foundation for God's people everywhere. If we break any of these, the result is that we are as guilty as having broken them all (James 2:10). This is not "our truth" or the "Hebrew people's truth" but THE truth! The commandments were given as follows: *Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of [a]slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods [b]before Me.*

4 "You shall not make for yourself [c]an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not [d]leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who [e]stays with you. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:1-17 NASB)

Far be it for me to expound upon a subject which has been dissected, subjected to commentary, sermonized and analyzed from a whole gamut of perspectives, from the non-believer to the fundamentalist! Several points, however, are clearly important. God identifies Himself as the Deliverer of the people. The first and perhaps most critical commandment is against worship of other "gods" - these created gods- some of which were created by the worshippers, were false and were a constant snare to Gods people- then and now. God identifies Himself as a God of "lovingkindness", yet reserves the right to punish disobedience. The week of God's people is to be patterned after the week of creation- with a sabbath day of rest. Parents are to be honored- the first commandment with a promise..."that your days may be prolonged" (vs 12). Murder is forbidden, but was defined by the Hebrew people and by us as a narrower concept than mere "killing". (<https://www.gotquestions.org/you-shall-not-murder.html>). Covetousness, adultery and false witness are seen as coequal in seriousness with murder. Jesus taught us as much later in history (Matthew 5).

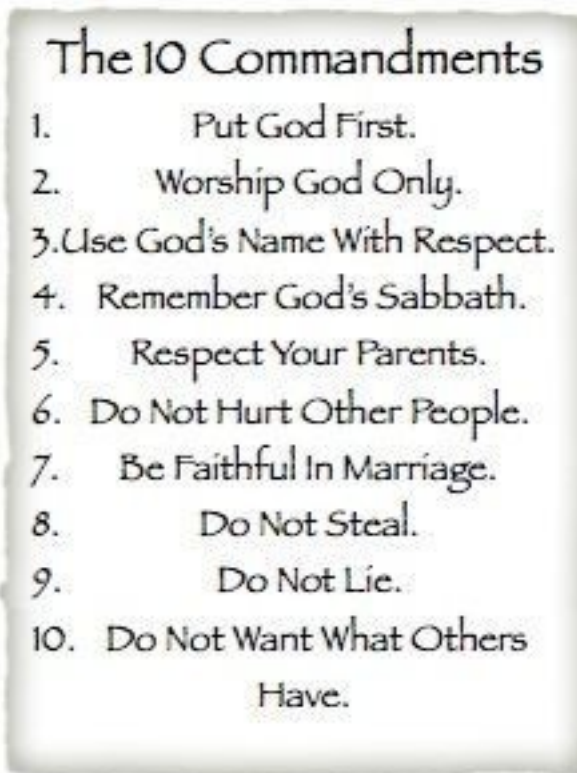
The people were understandably impressed with this dramatic scene of thunder and lightning, and they pleaded with Moses to speak to God for them: *"All the people perceived the [f]thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak [g]to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak [h]to us, or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may [i]remain with you, so that you may not sin."* (Exodus 20:18-20 NASB).

The beginnings of the myriad interpretations of the Law was already beginning. God spoke to them about how an altar was to be build (with stones cut and shaped elsewhere) and how the altar was to be approached. The role of the Levitical priests was just beginning to be defined: *"If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. 26 And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it."* (Exodus 20:25-26 NASB)

Exodus 21 and 22 are a summary of the various interpretations and specific examples of the applications of the basic moral law set forth in the commandments.

Significantly, and “eye for an eye” (Exodus 21:24) was actually a milder form of justice than “murder for an eye” which was the revengeful rule of the pagans living around the Hebrew people. Slavery was accepted, but the slave should be allowed to go free after seven years (Exodus 21:1-6). Sorcery is punishable by death, as is bestiality (Exodus 22:18-19)

God should not be cursed; the firstborn child and livestock will be dedicated to the Lord: *“You shall not ^[x]curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people. ²⁹ “You shall not delay the offering from ^[y]your harvest and your vintage. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. ³⁰ You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.”* (Exodus 22:29-30 NASB)



January 25, 2019 Exodus 23-25

In the “expansion” and interpretation of God’s Law, several key items emerge. First, the years, as well as the days, are to be observed as a sabbath. After each six years, there is to be a seventh sabbath year in which no crops are planted and the fields and orchards are to be available to the poor for gleaning- we will see this later in the dramatic story of Ruth: *“You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, 11 but on the seventh year you shall let it [j]rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.”* (Exodus 23:10-11 NASB)

The first commandment is so important to God's design for His people that the names of the "false/foreign" gods should not even be spoken: *"Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard [l]from your mouth."* (Exodus 23:13 NASB) James later expands on the evil that comes from "the tongue" (James 3:1-12)

Three yearly feasts are to be observed- unleavened bread (Passover), harvest (Pentecost), and "ingathering"(Tabernacles): *"Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. "You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And [m]none shall appear before Me empty-handed. 16 Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. 17 Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord [n]God."* Exodus 23:15-17 NASB) For a more detailed discussion, see (<http://www.jeremiahstudybible.com/Exodus/israels-three-great-feasts/>)

God's plan included the provision of a land specifically chosen for His people, To accomplish this transfer of land, the people must obey God and His "angel" that will go before them: *"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."* (Exodus 23:20 NASB) Most of the classic commentary identify this angel as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ Himself (1 Cor 10:9). See: (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/23-20.htm>)

God's people then affirm their belief and trust in God and His servant Moses, and promise to follow all the "laws and ordinances" that God has given to Moses: *"Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. 2 Moses alone, however, shall come near to the Lord, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him." 3 Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the [a]ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!"* (Exodus 24:1-3 NASB)

I would imagine that God was pleased by this affirmation, but realized that the people would still stray from the revealed truth that had been given to them. The old testament/covenant is in some ways the story of the seemingly endless dance of obedience and disobedience, forgiveness by God, followed by disobedience!

Moses, Aaron and twenty elders then went up on the mountain and "saw God" (and did not die!- see http://defendinginerrancy.com/bible-solutions/Exodus_24.9-11.php). The description of the appearance of God is reminiscent of the vision of the Lamb in Revelation (Rev 1:9-20): *"Then Moses went up [e]with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet [f]there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, [g]as clear as*

the sky itself. 11 Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.” (Exodus 24:9-11 NASB)

The Law is now to be written by God in stone, and as Moses went again to the mountain top he stayed there “40 days”: *“Now the Lord said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and [h]remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets [i]with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.” 13 So Moses arose [j]with Joshua his [k]servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. 14 But to the elders he said, “Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever [l]has a legal matter, let him approach them.” 15 Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 The glory of the Lord [m]rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. 17 And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. 18 Moses entered the midst of the cloud [n]as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” (Exodus 24:12-18 NASB)*

Forty days seems to signify here and in many other places in God’s Word a period of “trial or testing” Moses was not being tried, but the people of God, who had just affirmed their belief in and obedience to God, were being tested! Please see: (<https://www.gotquestions.org/40-days-Bible.html>).

God then instructs Moses in Exodus 25 as to: 1) offerings to God, which are to be made in a sanctuary- the specifications for which would be given for this “mobile” physical reminder of God’s presence; 2) the ark of the covenant- in which the tablets of stone and other sacred items were to be kept; 3) the table of showbread; and 4) the golden lampstand. These physical reminders of God’s presence were to be treasured and protected. The construction of these items include gold- the precious symbol of the eternal value of God’s covenant of protection, and acacia wood, which was one of the few woods available to the people in this part of the world (see: <https://www.gotquestions.org/acacia-wood.html>)



Ark of the Covenant with Sacred Elements

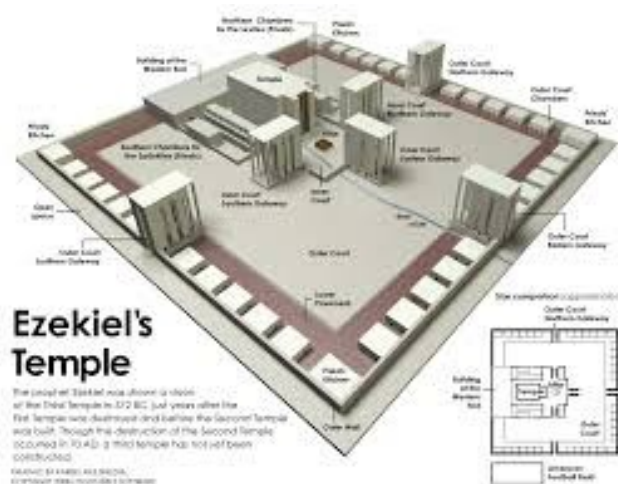
(<https://www.holylandgifts.net/products/ark-of-the-covenant-with-sacred-elements>)

January 26, 2019 Exodus 26-28

Why so much detail in the chapters describing the “mobile temple” that the people would carry with them in their wanderings in the wilderness? Did the people have any real understanding as to how long their wandering in the desert would be? Did they question the details that God provided to Moses about the construction of the temple?

The modern reader, when confronted with the level of detail and the number of specifications for the temple might decide to “skip over” this part of God’s Word. After all, since we do not follow the ceremonial Law of God any longer, why would we be enlightened by this level of detail? One answer that occurs to be is that God is illustrating with the specifics of His temple His infinite value, power, and preciousness to the people. Only the finest and most costly materials are used in construction (gold, purple dyed cloth) and the best craftsmen are to carefully create the items in the Temple. The “inner sanctum” where the ark of the covenant is kept is veiled (<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=2&c=26>) and separated from ordinary view. Later we will see the Temple veil torn in two (Matthew 27:50-51a) at the crucifixion of Jesus (<https://www.gotquestions.org/temple-veil-torn.html>).

There are three Temples described in Scripture: Solomon’s temple; Herod’s temple, and the “third” temple (Ezekiel 40) described in Ezekiel (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Solomon-first-temple.html>)



The first two temples are historic, and the remnant of the second temple is the well known and often visited “wailing wall”. The third temple was described to Ezekiel in a prophetic vision, and includes animal sacrifice for sin (Ezekiel 40:38-43)

The detail is of the “mobile temple” astonishing as seen in this passage: *“You shall make a veil of [at]blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. 32 You shall [au]hang*

it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four [av]sockets of silver. 33 You shall [aw]hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall [ax]serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies. 34 You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies. 35 You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side.

36 "You shall make a screen for the doorway of the tent of [ay]blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a [az]weaver. 37 You shall make five pillars of acacia for the screen and overlay them with gold, their hooks also being of gold; and you shall cast five [ba]sockets of [bb]bronze for them." (Exodus 26:31-27 NASB)

Since God "lived" in the temple, several points can be made as to what God was teaching His people in this part of Exodus: 1) God is infinitely precious, and deserving of the best; 2) He, and He only, is to be worshipped; 3) God has expectations of His people- that they love Him, live in harmony with each other, and seek His guidance for direction in their lives- in this case mainly through His revelation of Himself to the priests and appointed leaders.

God, who Himself is light, is to have a continuously lighted temple/tent of meeting: *"You shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the [u]light, to make a lamp [v]burn continually. 21 In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the Lord; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout their generations [w]for the sons of Israel." (Exodus 27:20-21)*

The Levitical order, from the tribe of Levi, was established and their orders of worship were described in detail. Only the priests could confidently approach God: *"For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics; you shall also make sashes for them, and you shall make [ac]caps for them, for glory and for beauty. 41 You shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him; and you shall anoint them and [ad]ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve Me as priests. 42 You shall make for them linen breeches to cover their bare flesh; they shall [ae]reach from the loins even to the thighs. 43 They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur [af]guilt and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and to his [ag]descendants after him." (Exodus 28:40-43 NASB)*

January 27, 2019 Exodus 29-31

God is the perfect teacher, reminder, and communicator. All of chapter 29 of Exodus describes in great detail the consecration (the act or declaration that something is sacred- or set aside for God) of the Levitical priests for service. The entire tribe of Levi was "set aside" for God and did not receive an allotment of land, as did the other tribes. God states that the purpose of these offerings and rituals is that: *"They shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the*

land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.” (Exodus 29:46 NASB)

God declares Himself to be the God who “dwells among them”- so that the God who “is always- past present and future” (Exodus 3:14) the great I Am- adds to the meaning of His Name and further teaches His people concerning His nature and personality. Later Jesus claims the same Name (John 8:56-59) to show us the ultimate expression of the “living with us” God- the Son himself!

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/I-AM.html>)

God living with us, both loving us and holding us accountable, is expressed beautifully in Psalm 139 as well as many sermons and expositions (see https://library.timelesstruths.org/texts/The_Christians_Secret_of_a_Happy_Life/God_with_Us/)

We must be careful not to “trivialize” God- to make Him “too small”- as if He were a “Super Santa” or “Cosmic Cop”! The very Creator of the universe is with us, to encourage, challenge, guide, direct and love us. This central reality is part of the Christian’s “secret” to a joyful and victorious life- to live a life totally yielded to Him- our will- which wants to assert itself as the final judge, arbiter and most important force in our lives- must be totally yielded to Him! As Campus Crusade, now “Cru” puts it- he must be on the throne of our lives.

God provides more specifications and requirements for our worship of Him in Exodus 30, about the altar of incense, the anointing oil, and the incense itself (Exodus 30:1, 22-24, 34-35). These items are a reminder and a teaching tool for God to illustrate the way that God perceives and receives our prayers and worship. As the prayers and worship “go up”, they are like a “pleasing aroma” to Him (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/four-aromas-god-loves-most>). (Exodus 29:18; Ephesians 5:2) (See: https://www.openbible.info/topics/pleasing_aroma_to_god)

God then calls skilled craftsmen- by name- and appoints them to create the objects and “equipment” for worship. They are to use their very best skill (given by God Himself!) to lovingly and carefully present their best to Him. The Scripture says: *“Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 3 I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of [a]craftsmanship, 4 to [b]make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in [c]bronze, 5 and in the cutting of stones [d]for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of [e]craftsmanship. 6 And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put [h]skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat upon it, and all the furniture of the tent, the table also and its [j]utensils, and the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering also with all its [l]utensils, and the laver and its stand, 10 the [m]woven garments as well, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, with which to [n]carry on their priesthood; 11 the anointing oil also, and the fragrant incense for*

the holy place, they are to make them according to all that I have commanded you.” (Exodus 31:1-11 NASB)

First, God calls the craftsmen “by name”. We will see this later in the call of God to Samuel (1 Samuel 3:3-10). God knows us intimately- He created each of us, and we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). He knew us before we were born! (Psalm 139:13)

So God instructs Moses to teach the people that the sabbath is to always be “set aside”- no work of any kind (the teachers of the Law would later make a code of specifications as to the meaning of “work”) was to be done, and the sabbath was a “sign” of God’s creative and delivering presence among His people:

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹³ ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. ¹⁴ Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶ So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to ^[a]celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ ¹⁷ It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.” ¹⁸ When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:12-18 NASB)

This was a “perpetual” covenant, as opposed to one made “for a time”, and was written on stone (<https://www.quora.com/What-does-the-phrase-nothing-is-written-in-stone-mean>) by the very “finger of God”! All would seem to be well- until Moses descended from his “mountain top” experience and saw the impatience, unbelief and sin of God’s people!

January 28, 2019 Exodus 32-34

Patience- who needs patience? The people saw that Moses was gone from their midst, and began to wonder if the true God would appear to them. Instead of being patient and waiting, they decided to “take things into their own hands” and create a “god” to worship. Amazingly, Aaron- who should have known (and done) better- was complicit in the construction of an idol. And so the golden calf is made and the people now have a “god” to worship: *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods[a] who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”*

2 Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” 3 So all the people took off

their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods,[b] Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." 6 So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." (Exodus 32:1-6 NASB)



A detail from "Moses with the Ten Commandments" by Rembrandt, 1659.

God is aware of this idolatry and sends Moses to the people and God vows to destroy them. Moses then reasons with God, reminding God that he brought these people out of Egypt, and that His Name would be less thought of among men - specifically the Egyptians- if He destroyed them. God then "relents" and decides not to destroy all the people! The Scripture says: *"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'*

9 "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

11 But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent

that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" 14 Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened." (Exodus 32:7-14 NASB)

Does this mean that God "changes His mind"? The situation here is similar to Abraham's pleading with God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. See (<https://www.gotquestions.org/God-change-mind.html>)

The consequences of this defiant disobedience were real- 3000 people died at the hands of those who had not "worshipped". Moses then begged God to forgive His people for this grievous sin against Him- after all, the first and second commandments deal with worship of other gods. Astonishingly, the Scripture does not record any punishment or "consequences" for Aaron: *19 When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. 20 And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.*

21 He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"

22 "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' 24 So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

25 Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. 26 So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.

27 Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. 29 Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day." (Exodus 32:19-29 NASB)

God's punishment for His people was to send a plague among them: *"The Lord replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. 34 Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin."* 35

And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.” (Exodus 32:33-35 NASB)

God- the “living with us” God- then threatens the people with His absence. The reason given is that the people are “stiff necked” and stubborn. Apparently God’s people were shocked and saddened by this revelation, so they “repented” and sorrowfully rid themselves of the articles of gold- the “ornaments” that the Egyptians had given them. As the gold itself the source of their sin- surely not! The sin was the desire to have a “visible god” that they could worship. In worshipping the created and not the uncreated God they sinned against God!: *“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ 2 I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 3 Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.”*

4 When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. 5 For the Lord had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.’” 6 So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.” (Exodus 33:1-6 NASB)

Moses then pitches a “tent of meeting” and spends time there conversing with God. Joshua, son of Nun, spends time in the tent of meeting, often staying behind when Moses leaves. We will see more of this remarkable man of God and leader as the Exodus story continues. The Bible tells us: *“Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. 8 And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. 9 As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. 10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. 11 The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” (Exodus 33:7-11 NASB)*

God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend”! This unique and close relationship was to be the source of blessing, guidance and leadership as Moses obeyed God and led the people. Moses asks God to be a Presence with him and the people, since without God they would fail, falter and suffer. The covenant would be broken if the people broke it out of frailty, lack of leadership and disobedience. God, who sees every need, agrees to be a Presence among the people and to guide them through Moses. Moses then makes an amazing request- to see the glory of God. Since seeing God face to face would be an overwhelming (and fatal!) experience, God shows Moses his glory and (only) His “back”: *“Then Moses said*

to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" 17 And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." 18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 19 And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." 21 Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (Exodus 32:15-23 NASB)

God's glory is described beautifully in a sermon by John Piper (<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-gods-glory--2>). WE see the Glory of God in several places in Scripture, dramatically in the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17).

The stone tablets written by God would then be replaced, and would later be part of the contents of the ark of the covenant. The Bible tells us: *"The LORD said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. 3 No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain."*

4 So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. 5 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Exodus 34:1-7 NASB)

The nature of God is clearly revealed in this passage- among His attributes are compassion, grace, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, and maintaining love, and forgiving wickedness. Yet God is just- He punishes those who are guilty!

God then established a covenant with the people, and repeats a summary of the Law given to His people: *"Then the Lord said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you. 11 Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 12 Be careful not to*

make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. 13 Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles.[a] 14 Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

15 "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. 16 And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

17 "Do not make any idols. 18 "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread. For seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

19 "The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock. 20 Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons. "No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

21 "Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest. 22 "Celebrate the Festival of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Festival of Ingathering at the turn of the year.[b] 23 Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel. 24 I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God. 25 "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Festival remain until morning. 26 "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk."

27 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." 28 Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments." (Exodus 34:10-28 NASB)

God clearly saw that His people would be ensnared by the pagan nations living in and around the Promised Land- unfortunately the people disobeyed, taking on the "gods" of these idol worshippers and suffered greatly because of their disobedience.

God "shared" some of His glory with Moses- since Moses was close to God and spoke with Him often, Moses' face became "radiant"- so bright that a veil was placed over his face: *"When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord."*

(Exodus 34:33-35 NASB). How I wish that all of us who love God would be so “radiant”- that we would be light (and salt)! (Matthew 5:13-16) (<https://www.gotquestions.org/salt-and-light.html>)



<https://loriodeheaven.wordpress.com/tag/radiant-face/>

January 29, 2019 Exodus 35-37

The sabbath, a mirror of the seventh day of Creation, when the God of the universe rested, was a key part of God’s relationship with His people. They were to follow the pattern of six days of work and one day of rest as a perpetual reminder of the God who created them. Moses instructed the people: *“Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, “These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to [a]do:*

2 “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a sabbath of complete rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. 3 You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day.” (Exodus 35:1-3 NASB)

Furthermore, the very best, the most precious and costly of the possessions of the people, were to be offered to the Lord to construct the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting. We will see this theme throughout the descriptions of sacrifice in the Old Testament- that which is the “very best”- the firstfruits, the gold and silver, the unblemished lamb, goat or bull- that which “costs” is to be sacrificed to the Lord! The Bible tells us: *“Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying, 5 ‘Take from among you a [b]contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord’s [c]contribution: gold, silver, and [d]bronze, 6 and [e]blue, purple and scarlet*

material, fine linen, goats' hair, 7 and rams' skins [f]dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, 8 and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, 9 and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the [g]breastpiece." (Exodus 35:4-9 NASB)

Not only are the materials to be costly, but the best craftsmen "workmen" are called into service to fashion a fitting dwelling for the Lord. (Exodus 35:10-19) The people's hearts were "moved" and they freely gave of their finest for this effort: *"Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence. 21 Everyone whose heart [s]tirred him and everyone whose spirit [t]moved him came and brought the Lord's [u]contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. 22 Then all [v]whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came and brought brooches and [w]earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so did every man who [x]presented an offering of gold to the Lord. 23 Every man, [y]who had in his possession [z]blue and purple and scarlet material and fine linen and goats' hair and rams' skins [aa]dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. 24 Everyone who could make a [ab]contribution of silver and [ac]bronze brought the Lord's [ad]contribution; and every man [ae]who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it." (Exodus 35:20-24 NASB)*

Moses also asked for money to compensate the workmen- the workman is worthy of their wages (1 Timothy 5:18, Leviticus 19:13). A small miracle occurs, the people are so generous that the money accumulated is in excess of the need! Some of us in fundraising for our churches should research this!

The Bible tells us: *"And all the [j]skillful men who were performing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from [k]the work which [l]he was performing, 5 and they said to [m]Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for the [n]construction work which the Lord commanded us to [o]perform." 6 So Moses issued a command, and a [p]proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, "Let no man or woman any longer perform work for the [q]contributions of the sanctuary." Thus the people were restrained from bringing any more. 7 For the [r]material they had was sufficient and more than enough for all the work, to perform it." (Exodus 36:4-7 NASB)*

The construction then proceeded as the craftsmen fashioned the article God had described to the through Moses (Exodus 36:8-38). The principle was- "God said it, we believe it, and we will be obedient". Not a bad pattern for the believers anywhere!

Exodus 37 is a description of the items carefully and expertly made by the craftsmen called to this work. Of special interest is the description of the Ark of the Covenant: *"Now Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; its length was two and a half [a]cubits, and its width one and a half cubits, and its height one and a half cubits; 2 and he overlaid it with pure gold inside and out, and made a gold molding for it all around. 3 He cast four rings of gold for it on its four feet; even two rings on one side of it, and two rings on the [b]other side of it. 4 He made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 5 He put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to*

carry [c]it. 6 He made a [d]mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits [e]long and one and a half cubits [f]wide. 7 He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered work [g]at the two ends of the mercy seat; 8 one cherub [h]at the one end and one cherub [i]at the other end; he made the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat [j]at the two ends. 9 The cherubim had their wings spread upward, covering the [k]mercy seat with their wings, with their faces toward each other; the faces of the cherubim were toward the mercy seat. (Exodus 37:1-9 NASB)



Ark of the Covenant (<https://www.thetrumpet.com/11045-finding-the-ark-of-the-covenant>)

The people believed that God “lived” between the angels on the “mercy seat” at the top of the ark. The ark contained Aaron’s rod (which budded), a container of manna, and the stone tablets of the Law given to Moses by God.

Wikileidia provides some interesting details about the Ark:

“The biblical account relates that, approximately one year after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, the Ark was created according to the pattern given to Moses by God when the Israelites were encamped at the foot of biblical Mount Sinai. Thereafter, the gold-plated acacia chest was carried by its staves while en route by the Levites approximately 2,000 cubits (approximately 800 meters or 2,600 feet) in advance of the people when on the march or before the Israelite army, the host of fighting men.[3] When carried, the Ark was always hidden under a large veil made of skins and blue cloth, always carefully concealed, even from the eyes of the priests and the Levites who carried it. God was said to have spoken with Moses "from between the two cherubim" on the Ark's cover.[4] When at rest the tabernacle was set up and the holy Ark was placed in it under the veil of the covering, the staves of it crossing the middle side bars to hold it up off the ground.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ark_of_the_Covenant)

The altar of incense is also described in detail: 25 *Then he made the altar of incense of acacia wood: a cubit [ab]long and a cubit [ac]wide, square, and two cubits*

[ad]high; its horns were of one piece with it. 26 He overlaid it with pure gold, its top and its [ae]sides all around, and its horns; and he made a gold molding for it all around. 27 He made two golden rings for it under its molding, on its two sides—on opposite sides—as holders for poles with which to carry it. 28 He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 29 And he made the holy anointing oil and the pure, fragrant incense of spices, the work of a perfumer. (Exodus 37:25-29 NASB)

Wikipedia provides a description of this altar and its place in worship: "The second altar was the Altar of Incense (mizbach haketores) (Exodus 30:1-10), called also the Golden Altar (mizbach hazahav) (39:38; Numbers 4:11), and the Inner Altar (mizbach hap'nimi) stood inside, in the Holy Place "before the Veil that is by the Ark of the Covenant."

The altar was constructed of shittim wood (acacia wood) and covered in pure gold. It was an upright rectangular stand, measuring one cubit wide, one cubit deep, and two cubits high, with a "horn" on each corner, a border of gold around the top, and rings on opposite sides through which poles could be passed to carry it (Exodus 37:25-26). The poles were made of shittim wood covered with gold. Moses consecrated the altar with the anointing oil when the Tabernacle was dedicated (Exodus 40:9).

Incense was burned daily on this altar at the time of the morning and the evening sacrifices. The coals used on this altar had to be taken from the Altar of Burnt Offerings. The incense used had to be made according to a specific formula (Exodus 30:34-35), and no other incense was permitted (Exodus 30:9). According to Jewish tradition, the incense was made by the Avtinas family, who closely guarded its secret. The offering of incense also had to be seasoned with salt.

The offering of incense was the apex of the daily morning and the evening services. According to the Rabbis, this was the part of the temple service that was most beloved by God (Zohar I 130:A). The burning of the incense was symbolic of the prayer of the people rising up to God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4). The offering of incense had to take place after the sacrifice, because only after the atonement could communion with God take place. After the offering of incense, the Kohanim (priests) pronounced the Priestly Blessing upon the people."

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altar_\(Bible\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altar_(Bible)))

January 30, 2019 Exodus 38-39

Further specifications and directions are given as to the construction and function of the components of the Tent of Meeting. The detail reveals the careful attention to the use of the finest materials, the best craftsmen, and the most elaborate procedures that are to be followed. Again, God is teaching His people the necessity of obedience—"one act of obedience is worth a hundred sermons" as stated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

(<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/20-influential-quotes-by-dietrich-bonhoeffer.html>)

The Altar of Burnt Offering (Exodus 38:1-7), the Wash Basin (Exodus 38:8) and the Courtyard (Exodus 38:9-20) are all described. This “portable temple” was to serve as the center of worship for God’s people for their time wandering in the desert (<https://www.gotquestions.org/tent-of-meeting.html>).



Tent of Meeting

<https://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-qa/qa-archives/question/were-the-israelites-allowed-to-enter-the-tent-of-meeting/>

A truly astonishing amount of gold, silver and fine cloth and other materials was used in the construction of this “Tabernacle”. The Scripture sums it up this way: *“These are the amounts of the materials used for the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the covenant law, which were recorded at Moses’ command by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest. 22 (Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made everything the Lord commanded Moses; 23 with him was Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan—an engraver and designer, and an embroiderer in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen.) 24 The total amount of the gold from the wave offering used for all the work on the sanctuary was 29 talents and 730 shekels,[i] according to the sanctuary shekel.*

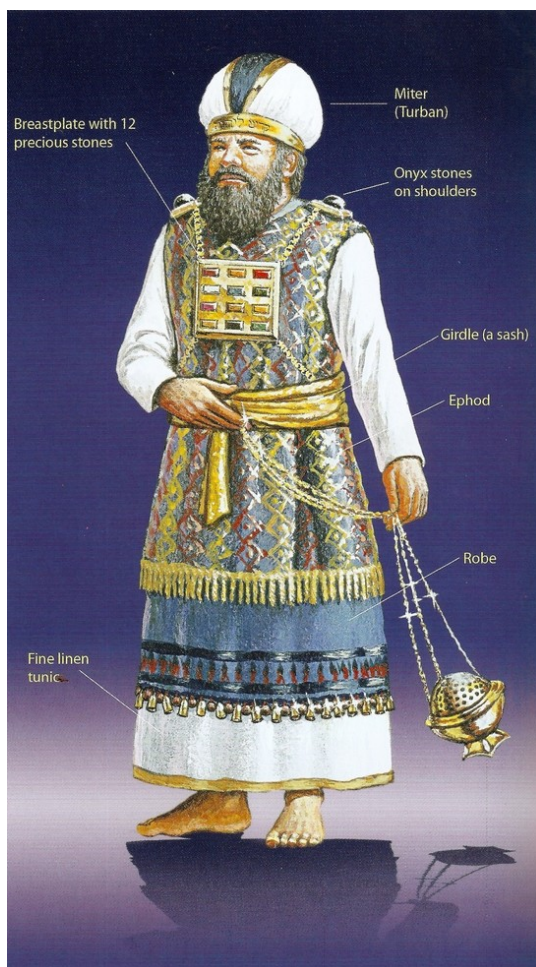
25 The silver obtained from those of the community who were counted in the census was 100 talents[j] and 1,775 shekels,[k] according to the sanctuary shekel— 26 one beka per person, that is, half a shekel,[l] according to the sanctuary shekel, from everyone who had crossed over to those counted, twenty years old or more, a total of 603,550 men. 27 The 100 talents of silver were used to cast the bases for the sanctuary and for the curtain—100 bases from the 100 talents, one talent for

each base. 28 They used the 1,775 shekels to make the hooks for the posts, to overlay the tops of the posts, and to make their bands.

29 The bronze from the wave offering was 70 talents and 2,400 shekels.[m] 30 They used it to make the bases for the entrance to the tent of meeting, the bronze altar with its bronze grating and all its utensils, 31 the bases for the surrounding courtyard and those for its entrance and all the tent pegs for the tabernacle and those for the surrounding courtyard.” (Exodus 38:21-31 NASB)

At today’s market price, a talent (33 kg) of silver would be worth about \$1.25 million (at \$38/ounce= 29 grams); a talent (33 kg) of gold would be worth about \$52 million (at \$1600/ounce) Today’s (1/29/2019) spot prices for silver and gold are \$15.80/oz for silver and \$1380/oz for gold! However the cost is calculated, the worth of the materials used was far in excess of the amount of money commonly earned or used by any given individual of that day. The lesson is clear- we are to give God our “utmost” as memorialized by the late Oswald Chambers (utmost.org)!

The “priestly garments” are described in Exodus 39- the ephod (Exodus 39:2-7); the breastpiece (Exodus 39:8-21) and the “other” garments (Exodus 39:22-31).



Priestly Garments (<https://mudpreacher.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/aaron-in-priestly-clothing-of-glory-and-beauty.jpg>)

Now that everything had been carefully and expertly crafted and assembled, Moses inspected everything to make certain that God's directions and specifications had been followed exactly. Everything had been constructed according to plan: *"The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 43 Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them."* (Exodus 39:42-43 NASB)

We receive (and very often miss) the blessings that God has for us when we stray from His guidance and will for our lives. How many times do I question God, argue with God, become angry or irritated with God because of His demands and expectations. This, I believe, is one of the great benefits of accountability. Each believer would greatly benefit from an accountability partner. Wesley saw the merit in this accountability in his organization of "holy clubs" (<https://www.hopefaithprayer.com/john-wesley-holy-club-questions/>)

January 31, 2019 Exodus 40

Now God gives directions as to a special day- the "first day of the first month". The ark is to be veiled, only to be seen by the priest. The selection of this day is near the Vernal Equinox, and marks the time of about one year after the people left Egypt. Ellicotts's commentary on Exodus 40:2 reads: "On the first day of the first month—The Israelites had quitted Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month, Abib (Exodus 12:6). They had reached the wilderness of Sinai in the course of the third month, Sivan, and encamped in front of Sinai shortly after (Exodus 19:1-2). The two long absences of Moses in the Mount had occupied nearly three months, and were separated by an interval probably of several days. It must have been the sixth or seventh month before the work was commenced, and very late in the year—the eleventh or twelfth month—before it was accomplished. Hence, the new year was now approaching, and, as it was approaching, its first day was naturally chosen as most fit for the inauguration of the new structure."

(<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/40-2.htm>)

The Scripture describes all the steps the priests and the people are to take on this first observance of worship in the completed Tent of Meeting: *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "On the first day of the first month you shall set up the [a]tabernacle of the tent of meeting. 3 You shall place the ark of the testimony there, and you shall screen the ark with the veil. 4 You shall bring in the table and [b]arrange what belongs on it; and you shall bring in the lampstand and [c]mount its lamps. 5 Moreover, you shall set the gold altar of incense before the ark of the testimony, and set up the veil for the doorway to the tabernacle. 6 You shall set the altar of burnt offering in front of the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. 7 You shall set the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put*

water [d]in it. 8 You shall set up the court all around and [e]hang up the veil for the gateway of the court. 9 Then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and shall consecrate it and all its [f]furnishings; and it shall be holy. 10 You shall anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, and the altar shall be most holy. 11 You shall anoint the laver and its stand, and consecrate it. 12 Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. 13 You shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister as a priest to Me. 14 You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them; 15 and you shall anoint them even as you have anointed their father, that they may minister as priests to Me; and their anointing will [g]qualify them for a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations." 16 Thus Moses did; according to all that the Lord had commanded him, so he did.

17 Now in the first month [h]of the second year, on the first day of the month, the [i]tabernacle was erected. 18 Moses erected the tabernacle and [j]laid its [k]sockets, and set up its boards, and [l]inserted its bars and erected its pillars. 19 He spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent [m]on top of it, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 20 Then he took the testimony and put it into the ark, and [n]attached the poles to the ark, and put the [o]mercy seat [p]on top of the ark. 21 He brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up a veil for the screen, and screened off the ark of the testimony, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 22 Then he put the table in the tent of meeting on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil. 23 He set the arrangement of bread in order on it before the Lord, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 24 Then he placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle. 25 He lighted the lamps before the Lord, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 26 Then he placed the gold altar in the tent of meeting in front of the veil; 27 and he burned fragrant incense on it, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 28 Then he set up the [q]veil for the doorway of the tabernacle. 29 He set the altar of burnt offering before the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the meal offering, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 30 He placed the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. 31 From it Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. 32 When they entered the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 33 He erected the court all around the [r]tabernacle and the altar, and [s]hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus Moses finished the work." (Exodus 40:1-33 NASB)

Oil is used to anoint and consecrate "set aside" the Tabernacle- we will see many examples of anointing oil in the Scriptures (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_anointing_oil) (examples in 1 Samuel 10:1; James 5:13-14). Aaron and his sons were garbed in the priestly garments and washed with water, a symbol and practice of purification (Matthew 3:11; Hebrews 10:22) and is part of baptism.

The the “glory of the Lord” filled the Tabernacle, and was so bright that the Tabernacle could not be entered. God would use this same glory/light to lead his people on their long journey before their (final!) entry into to Promised Land. The Bible says: *“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36 Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; 37 but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. 38 For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.”* (Exodus 40:34-38 NASB)

This was not a “one time” appearance- the “cloud” would instruct the people as to when they were to leave a certain place on their journey- and for night travels the cloud was replaced by “fire”. We see somewhat the same scene of the filling of the (now permanent) temple when Solomon completes his work: *“Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house.”* (2 Chronicles 7:1 NASB)



Glory of the Lord (www.cestuee.com)

February 1, 2019 Leviticus 1-3

Leviticus 1 is a list of requirements set forth by God for the offerings that are suitable and pleasing to Him. The offerings are to be those which cost the giver something- an animal without defect- and which are given over (dedicated) to Him. In some cases the animals were burned after being slaughtered, in some cases the meat was roasted and used as part of the daily fare of the priests. When Jesus was dedicated at the Temple, his parents, being relatively poor, offered a bird (a dove) as prescribed here: *‘But if his offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering from the turtledoves or from young pigeons. 15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, and wring off its head and offer it up in smoke on the altar; and its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar. 16 He shall also take away its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar eastward, to the place of the [d]ashes. 17 Then he shall tear it by its wings, but shall not sever it. And the priest*

shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the wood which is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord.” (Leviticus 1:14-17 NASB) The “soothing aroma” was symbolic of the pleasure God received from the sacrifices (and prayers) of His people

Grain offerings, described in Leviticus 2, were not to include leaven – a reminder of the unleavened bread prepared at the beginning of the exodus from Egypt. The seasoning was to be salt, a valuable commodity, emphasizing the “bringing of the best” principle that God prescribed: *“No grain offering, which you bring to the Lord, shall be made with leaven, for you shall not offer [c]up in smoke any leaven or any honey as an offering by fire to the Lord. 12 As an offering of first fruits you shall bring them to the Lord, but they shall not ascend for a soothing aroma on the altar. 13 Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.”* (Leviticus 2: 11-13 NASB) An article by Wikipedia illustrates the features that salt had in this culture (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_in_the_Bible) In Jesus’ teachings we are told to be “salt” (Matthew 5:13-14).

The Peace Offering, described in Leviticus 3, includes a prohibition against eating “fat or blood”- the fat “belongs to the Lord” (Leviticus 3:16-17). The commentary is helpful here (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/leviticus/3-1.htm>) The very helpful website “Got Questions” gives a good description of the threefold purposes of the peace offering: “A peace offering in the Old Testament Law is described in Leviticus 7:11-21. It was a voluntary sacrifice given to God in three specific instances. First, a peace offering could be given as a freewill offering, meaning that the worshiper was giving the peace offering as a way to say thank you for God’s unsought generosity. It was basically just a way to praise God for His goodness. The second way a peace offering could be given was alongside a fulfilled vow. A good example of this was when Hannah fulfilled her vow to God by bringing Samuel to the temple; on that occasion she also brought a peace offering to express the peace in her heart toward God concerning her sacrifice—it was a way to say, “I have no resentment; I am holding nothing back in the payment of my vow.” The third purpose of a peace offering was to give thanksgiving for God’s deliverance in an hour of dire need. None of these three reasons to sacrifice had anything to do with propitiation, with appeasing God, or with pacifying Him.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/peace-offering.html>).

The peace offering may have been a foreshadowing of the great sacrifice Jesus was to make on our behalf, the ultimate Peace Offering to God, as suggested by the Got Questions website: “Throughout the ages, people have been tempted to think that sacrifices create God’s favor. This belief is evident in our modern understanding of a peace offering as a propitiation for wrongdoing. But only Christ’s sacrifice creates favor with God and covers wrongdoing, and the Old Testament sacrifices were a picture of that future provision.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/peace-offering.html>)

February 2, 2019 Leviticus 4-6

The sin offering. A graded response is prescribed, depending on the person committing the sin and whether or not the sin was intentional or not. A priest must sacrifice a bull, since his sin brings guilt to the people: *“If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering[a] for the sin he has committed. 4 He is to present the bull at the entrance to the tent of meeting before the Lord. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it there before the Lord. 5 Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the tent of meeting. 6 He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the Lord, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. 7 The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the Lord in the tent of meeting. The rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 8 He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—all the fat that is connected to the internal organs, 9 both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys— 10 just as the fat is removed from the ox[b] sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. 11 But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the internal organs and the intestines— 12 that is, all the rest of the bull—he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it there in a wood fire on the ash heap.”* (Leviticus 4:3-12 NASB)

If the whole community sins, even if the sin is unintentional, then a bull sacrifice is also required: *“If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, when they realize their guilt 14 and the sin they committed becomes known, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the tent of meeting.”* (Leviticus 4:13-14 NASB)

If a leader sins unintentionally, a male goat sacrifice is required (Leviticus 4: 22-26). If a person in the community sins unintentionally, then a female goat sacrifice is required (Leviticus 4: 27-31) Following this passage is a description of the sacrifice of a lamb (Leviticus 4: 32-35)

Sins of omission are to be atoned for with the sacrifice of a female lamb or goat (Leviticus 5:1-6). If they cannot afford the lamb or goat, sacrifice of two doves or pigeons is prescribed- one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering (Leviticus 5:7-10). If they cannot afford even this offering, they are to bring a tenth of an ephah of the “finest wheat” (Leviticus 5:11-13)

Leviticus 5:14-19 describes the guilt offering, for sinning unintentionally against the Lord’s “holy things” or unintentionally violates one of God’s command (I assume this is the ten commandments), then a ram sacrifice is required.

Leviticus 6 describes the guilt offering for deception, cheating, swearing falsely, or extortion with a sacrifice of a ram (Leviticus 6:1-7) The sin was committed and the person later “realizes their guilt” and offers the sacrifice.

Next the burnt offering (Leviticus 6:8-13), the grain offering (Leviticus 6:14-23), and the procedures for the priests regarding the guilt offering (Leviticus 6:24-30) are described.

The commentary is helpful here, describing the sacrifices and the intricate and detailed specifications for them was a design “The design of all these minute ceremonies was to impress the minds, both of priests and people, with a sense of the evil nature of sin and the care they should take to prevent the least taint of its impurities clinging to them.”

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/leviticus/leviticus-6.html>). The Enduring Word commentary is helpful: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/leviticus-6/>)

What is difficult for most readers of these texts, looking at them as forgiven persons, washed by the blood of the Lamb, whose blood cleanses all sins, is the endless nature of the sacrifices. Since everyone sins, intentionally or unintentionally (or by omission), it would seem that a veritable “river” of blood was shed for the sins of God’s people before the coming of Jesus, the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God! We claim and cling to God’s promise that the sacrifice of His Son was “once and for all”. We see in Hebrews 10:1-10 (NASB): *“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very [a]form of things, [b]can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in [c]those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,*

“Sacrifice and offering You have not desired,

But a body You have prepared for Me;

6 In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.

7 “Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come

(In the scroll of the book it is written of Me)

To do Your will, O God.””

8 After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He [d]said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By [e]this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”



<http://raynoah.com/2017/03/17/thank-god-for-the-once-and-for-all-sacrifice/>

February 3, 2019 Leviticus 7-8

The regulations and specifications continue, and a summary of these is given at the end of Leviticus 7: *“These, then, are the regulations for the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the ordination offering and the fellowship offering, 38 which the Lord gave Moses at Mount Sinai in the Desert of Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the Lord.”*(Leviticus 7:37-38 NASB)

A few details of this sacrificial system of offering are worthy of note: 1) eating of the fat or blood of a sacrificial animal was forbidden: 22 The Lord said to Moses, 23 “Say to the Israelites: ‘Do not eat any of the fat of cattle, sheep or goats. 24 The fat of an animal found dead or torn by wild animals may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. 25 Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which a food offering may be[c] presented to the Lord must be cut off from their people. 26 And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. 27 Anyone who eats blood must be cut off from their people.’” (Leviticus 7:22-27 NASB); 2) part of certain offerings is to be provided to the Levites/priests as food- a “perpetual share”: *“The Lord said to Moses, 29 “Say to the Israelites: ‘Anyone who brings a fellowship offering to the Lord is to bring part of it as their sacrifice to the Lord. 30 With their own hands they are to present the food offering to the Lord; they are to bring the fat, together with the breast, and wave the breast before the Lord as a wave offering. 31 The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast belongs to Aaron and his sons. 32 You are to give the right thigh of your fellowship offerings to the priest as a contribution. 33 The son of Aaron who offers the blood and the fat of the fellowship offering shall have the right thigh as his share. 34 From the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, I have taken the breast that is waved and the thigh that is presented and have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their perpetual*

share from the Israelites.” 35 This is the portion of the food offerings presented to the Lord that were allotted to Aaron and his sons on the day they were presented to serve the Lord as priests. 36 On the day they were anointed, the Lord commanded that the Israelites give this to them as their perpetual share for the generations to come.” (Leviticus 7:28-36 NASB)

Many scholars and commentators believe that these five offerings described in Leviticus 1-7 are a “type” or picture of the coming sacrifice of Jesus (<http://biblecentre.org/content.php?mode=7&item=899>)



As an example, Raymond Campbell describes the first offering, the burnt offering, in this way: “Here we have the highest aspect of the work of Christ where He is seen offering Himself up entirely to God to do His will even unto death. The whole offering, except the skin of the animal, was burnt upon the altar and all went up to God as a sweet savour. It pictures Christ who gave Himself as “a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour” (Eph. 5:2). Christ is not seen here as bearing our sins, but as accomplishing the Father's will, glorifying Him and vindicating the holiness and majesty of His throne. This theme is especially prominent in John's Gospel and in Psalm 40.”

Leviticus 8 describes the ordination of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood. In modern times, if someone has the last name “Levy”, it is almost a certainty that there is a connection to the tribe of the Levites! “Jewish (Ashkenazic and Sephardic): from the Biblical personal name Levi, from a Hebrew word meaning ‘joining’. This was borne by a son of Jacob and Leah (Genesis 29: 34). Bearers of this

name are Levites, members of the tribe of Levi, who form a hereditary caste who assist the kohanim (see Cohen) in their priestly duties. Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press

<https://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=levy>

Among the items described for performing priestly duties are the “Urim and Thummim” (Leviticus 8:8). (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-urim-and-thummim>) Most scholars believe these were used as “deciders” when an issue or problem was too difficult to resolve. The Urim and Thummim were then used as if one were to “flip a coin” to determine the correct answer or solution. We see references to this practice, in which God was believed to operate on the outcome of this test, so that the answer was not “by chance” but was God’s answer to the issue or problem. When Jonah is fleeing from God, and a storm breaks out and endangers the ship, the crew “cast lots” to determine the cause (the person) responsible (Jonah 1:7). Joshua used this method in assigning land to the various tribes in the Promised Land (Joshua 18:10) The fancy word for casting lots is cleromancy (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleromancy>) described in Wikipedia as “Cleromancy is a form of sortition, casting of lots, in which an outcome is determined by means that normally would be considered random, such as the rolling of dice, but are sometimes believed to reveal the will of God, or other supernatural entities.” The disciples in the New Testament “cast lots” to guide them in the selection of Matthias, the disciple who was to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26).



Casting Lots <https://earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/casting-lots-in-the-bible/>

Do we really believe that God acts to answer questions in this way? (See <https://www.gotquestions.org/casting-lots.html>) . The authors of an article on the website “Early Church History” make this statement: “But in the early, middle and

modern periods of the Christian Church the casting of lots was and is usually forbidden after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Our indwelling Wisdom is supposed to make up for our uncertainties."

Also mentioned in the priestly descriptions is the use of anointing oil, a practice seen through the Scriptures (Leviticus 8:10-12) *"Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them. 11 He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand, to consecrate them. 12 He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him."* A good summary of the purpose and uses of anointing oil is found in Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_anointing_oil). Anointing oil is used to consecrate Samuel as king is described in 1 Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1) James tells us that we are to anoint the sick when we pray over them for healing (James 5:13-14)

The conclusion of Leviticus 8 described the obedience of God's people to these regulations, descriptions and commands- their obedience was complete: "So Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord commanded through Moses." (Leviticus 8:36 NASB) The great theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer summarized this principle beautifully in the wonderful book "The Cost of Discipleship": "'Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.'" Our obedience, then is directly and intimately connected with our belief- we cannot truly obey until we believe!

February 4, 2019 Leviticus 9-10

Two things are of particular note in Leviticus 9: 1) the priests, led by Aaron, performed the ritual of sacrifice for the burnt offering; and 2) when this was accomplished, the "glory of the Lord" filled the tabernacle/tent of meeting and the people rejoiced and "fell on their faces". God kept his covenant bargain by affirming that he was the God who was "with them" and showed His presence clearly, and the reward for obedience was joy in the people! God was teaching the people the rhythm of sacrifice and obedience followed by joy and fulfilment in the worshiper.

The Scripture teaches us: *"He (Aaron) brought the burnt offering and offered it in the prescribed way. 17 He also brought the grain offering, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning's burnt offering.*

18 He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship offering for the people. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar. 19 But the fat portions of the ox and the ram—the fat tail, the layer of fat, the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver— 20 these they laid on the breasts, and then Aaron burned the fat on the altar. 21 Aaron waved the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord as a wave offering, as Moses commanded.

22 Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down." (Leviticus 9:16-22 NASB)

The reward was God's clear presence and blessing, and joy in the worshipers: *"Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. 24 Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown."* (Leviticus 9:23-24 NASB)

The Scriptures teach us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and the immediate and impactful result of two of Aaron's sons making "unlawful fire" with their censers was immediate death. However cruel and undeserved the death of these two might seem to us, it is clear that God was again teaching us the true cost of sin! The Bible says: *"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. 2 So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. 3 Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke of when he said:*

"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

Aaron remained silent." (Leviticus 10:1-3 NASB)

So God "proves Himself holy" and will be "honored", teaching in perhaps the most dramatic way possible.

Aaron "remained silent", not grieving in an outward way, but realized that the punishment of God was righteous and submitted himself to this wrathful judgment of his very flesh and blood.

Matthew Henry's commentary is helpful here: "Verses 1-2 Here is, I. The great sin that Nadab and Abihu were guilty of: and a great sin we must call it, how little soever it appears in our eye, because it is evident by the punishment of it that it was highly provoking to the God of heaven, whose judgment, we are sure, is according to truth. But what was their sin? All the account here given of it is that they offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not (v. 1), and the same Num. 3:4 . It does not appear the they had any orders to burn incense at all at this time. It is true their consecration was completed the day before, and it was part of their work, as priests, to serve at the altar of incense; but, it should seem, the whole service of this solemn day of inauguration was to be performed by Aaron himself, for he slew the sacrifices ch. 9:8, ch. 9:15, ch. 9:18), and his sons were only to attend him (v. 9, v. 12, v. 18); therefore Moses and Aaron only went into the tabernacle, v. 23. But Nadab and Abihu were so proud of the honour they were newly advanced to, and so ambitious of doing the highest and most honourable part of their work immediately, that though the service of this day was extraordinary, and done by particular direction from Moses, yet without receiving orders, or so much as asking leave from him, they took their censers, and they would enter into the tabernacle, at the door of which they thought they had attended long enough, and would burn incense. And then their offering strange fire is the same with offering strange incense, which is expressly forbidden, Ex. 30:9 .

Moses, we may suppose, had the custody of the incense which was prepared for this purpose (Ex. 39:38), and they, doing this without his leave, had none of the incense which should have been offered, but common incense, so that the smoke of their incense came from a strange fire. God had indeed required the priests to burn incense, but, at this time, it was what he commanded them not; and so their crime was like that of Uzziah the king, 2 Chr. 26:16 . The priests were to burn incense only when it was their lot (Lu. 1:9), and, at this time, it was not theirs. 2. Presuming thus to burn incense of their own without order, no marvel that they made a further blunder, and instead of taking of the fire from the altar, which was newly kindled from before the Lord and which henceforward must be used in offering both sacrifice and incense (Rev. 8:5), they took common fire, probably from that with which the flesh of the peace-offerings was boiled, and this they made use of in burning incense; not being holy fire, it is called strange fire; and, though not expressly forbidden, it was crime enough that God commanded it not. For (as bishop Hall well observes here) "It is a dangerous thing, in the service of God, to decline from his own institutions; we have to do with a God who is wise to prescribe his own worship, just to require what he has prescribed, and powerful to revenge what he has not prescribed." 3. Incense was always to be burned by only one priest at a time, but here they would both go in together to do it. 4. They did it rashly, and with precipitation. They snatched their censers, so some read it, in a light careless way, without due reverence and seriousness: when all the people fell upon their faces, before the glory of the Lord, they thought the dignity of their office was such as to exempt them from such abasements. The familiarity they were admitted to bred a contempt of the divine Majesty; and now that they were priests they thought they might do what they pleased. 5. There is reason to suspect that they were drunk when they did it, because of the law which was given upon this occasion, v. 8. They had been feasting upon the peace-offerings, and the drink-offerings that attended them, and so their heads were light, or, at least, their hearts were merry with wine; they drank and forgot the law (Prov. 31:5) and were guilty of this fatal miscarriage. 6. No doubt it was done presumptuously; for, if it had been done through ignorance, they would have been allowed the benefit of the law lately made, even for the priests, that they should bring a sin-offering, ch. 4:2, ch. 4:3 . But the soul that doth aught presumptuously, and in contempt of God's majesty, authority, and justice, that soul shall be cut off, Num. 15:30 .II. The dreadful punishment of this sin: There went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, v. 2. This fire which consumed the sacrifices came the same way with that which had consumed the sacrifices ch. 9:24), which showed what justice would have done to all the guilty people if infinite mercy had not found and accepted a ransom; and, if that fire struck such an awe upon the people, much more would this.1. Observe the severity of their punishment. (1.) They died. Might it not have sufficed if they had been only struck with a leprosy, as Uzziah, or struck dumb, as Zechariah, and both by the altar of incense? No; they were both struck dead. The wages of this sin was death. (2.) They died suddenly, in the very act of their sin, and had not time so much as to cry, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" Though God is long-suffering to us-ward, yet sometimes he makes quick work with sinners; sentence is executed speedily: presumptuous sinners bring upon themselves a swift destruction, and are justly denied even space to repent. (3.) They died before the Lord; that is, before

the veil that covered the mercy-seat; for even mercy itself will not suffer its own glory to be affronted. Those that sinned before the Lord died before him. Damned sinners are said to be tormented in the presence of the Lamb, intimating that he does not interpose on their behalf, Rev. 14:10 . (4.) They died by fire, as by fire they sinned. They slighted the fire that came from before the Lord to consume the sacrifices, and thought other fire would do every jot as well; and now God justly made them feel the power of that fire which they did not reverence. Thus those that hate to be refined by the fire of divine grace will undoubtedly be ruined by the fire of divine wrath. The fire did not burn them to ashes, as it had done the sacrifices, nor so much as singe their coats (v. 5), but, like lightning, struck them dead in an instant; by these different effects of the same fire God would show that it was no common fire, but kindled by the breath of the Almighty, Isa. 30:23 . (5.) It is twice taken notice of in scripture that they died childless, Num. 3:4 , and 1 Chr. 24:2 . By their presumption they had reproached God's name, and God justly blotted out their names, and laid that honour in the dust which they were proud of.² But why did the Lord deal thus severely with them? Were they not the sons of Aaron, the saint of the Lord, nephews to Moses, the great favourite of heaven? Was not the holy anointing oil sprinkled upon them, as men whom God had set apart for himself? Had they not diligently attended during the seven days of their consecration, and kept the charge of the Lord, and might not that atone for this rashness?"

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/leviticus/10.html>)

After a sin offering is made (presumably for the sin of the two erring sons), Moses questions the offering procedure until he realizes why it was made: *"When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering[b] and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, 17 "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the Lord. 18 Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded."*

19 Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" 20 When Moses heard this, he was satisfied." (Leviticus 10:16-20 NASB)

Again, the commentary on these dramatic events is helpful
(<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/leviticus-10/>)



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Death of Nadab and Abihu, the Bible, Leviticus X, verse 1,2: ' And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his **Contributor:** [Lebrecht Music & Arts](#) / Alamy Stock Photo

The commentary also answers a question of mine about Aaron not facing consequences for his leadership in the creation of the Golden calf. The commentator suggests that the loss of Aaron's two sons was the logical result of Aaron's sins in that event (see https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/1490181/jewish/Why-did-the-Two-Eldest-Sons-of-Aaron-Die.htm).

February 5, 2019 Leviticus 11-13

Dietary laws are described in great detail in Leviticus 11. What was the purpose of these? Did God deliberately prevent His people from enjoying pork barbecue or a ham sandwich? The Church of God explores some of the issues regarding this topic (<https://lifehopeandtruth.com/bible/biblical-laws/clean-and-unclean-animals/>), including questions about the New Testament, especially Peter's vision of a "sheet" descending from heaven, and God's command to "kill and eat" (Acts 10:9-16). In Leviticus we read: *"The Lord spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, 2 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. 3 Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. 4 Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not*

divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. 5 Likewise, the [a]shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; 6 the [b]rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; 7 and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. 8 You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.” (Leviticus 1:1-8 NASB)

Careful examination of these rules and restrictions reveals that the “unclean animals” are scavengers (like a lobster , catfish, or buzzard) or have meat that frequently carries diseases (such as pork with trichinosis) or would spoil easily and not be amenable to the meat preservation methods available at that time. God seems to be teaching His people that they are to stay healthy by following His rules!

The summary of Leviticus 10 reads: *“This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, 47 to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.”* Leviticus 11:46-47 NASB)

Leviticus 12 prescribes the “Laws of Motherhood” this way: *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: ‘When a woman [a]gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of [b]her menstruation she shall be unclean. 3 On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 4 Then she shall remain in the blood of her purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed. 5 But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her [c]menstruation; and she shall remain in the blood of her purification for sixty-six days.*

6 ‘When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. 7 Then he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the [d]flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. 8 But if [e]she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.’” (Leviticus 12 NASB)

The modern reader may immediately object to the notion that a woman is “clean” sooner (eight days versus 14 days) with the birth of a son than a daughter, or that the woman is somehow “unclean” when she gives birth. Jesus’ attitude (and that of his earthly parents) was typically to “follow the law”. He states clearly (Matthew 5:17-18): *“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not [h]the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”*

On the several occasions that Jesus would heal a leper, He would instruct the healed person to present himself to a priest, so that the Law regarding cleansing could be followed (Matthew 8:4). Jesus' earthly parents followed the prescriptions in Leviticus 12 and presented Jesus to the priest at the Temple, and were only able to afford a pigeon to offer for atonement (Luke 2:21-40). He was circumcised after the eighth day according to this Law.



Presentation of Christ at the Temple by Hans Holbein the Elder, 1500-01
(Kunsthalle, Hamburg)

Leviticus 13 describes the procedures to avoid infection by skin diseases, as well as the prescribed treatment for these diseases. These were the laws and procedures Jesus was referring to when He cleansed and healed the lepers. We read: "This is the law for the mark of leprosy in a garment of wool or linen, whether in the warp or in the woof, or in any article of leather, for pronouncing it clean or unclean." (Leviticus 13: 59). Did God somehow not have compassion on these miserable infected persons? We see that they are to be "apart" from the people, and warn anyone who approaches "too close": *"As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be [ae]uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp."* Leviticus 13:45-46 NASB)

Leprosy is clearly an infectious disease, and the separation of infected persons- a “quarantine” would be one way of preventing widespread infection. The CDC has released a description of the infection risk of leprosy, now called Hansen’s Disease (<https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/index.html>) It is a bacterial disease, and can be spread with “extensive contact” with an infected person. Thus the separation and quarantine prescribed in Scripture. The people did not have available the current treatment (multidrug therapy), so this is perhaps another way of God setting limits to protect His people (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy>).

Jesus, who may have understood the limited spread of this dreaded infection, showed both His courage and knowledge of this disease in touching a leper to heal them (Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:40-41). The God of the universe showed both His power and knowledge in these events!

February 6, 2019 Leviticus 14-15

Leviticus 14 is a summary of the “law of leprosy”: *“This is the law for any mark of leprosy—even for a scale, 55 and for the leprous garment or house, 56 and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot— 57 to teach [aj]when they are unclean and [ak]when they are clean. This is the law of leprosy.”* (Leviticus 14:54-57 NASB) The commentary is helpful in navigating the minute detail and ritual that was to be followed (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/leviticus/14.htm>)

This online reference explores the spiritual aspects of leprosy specifically, and diseases in general in the overarching theme of God’s relationship to the earth and its people: “Although we can’t know all the reasons that God allows disease into our lives, biblical leprosy is a powerful symbol reminding us of sin’s spread and its horrible consequences. Like leprosy, sin starts out small but can then spread, leading to other sins and causing great damage to our relationship with God and others.

Studying leprosy helps us see why pain is a valuable “gift,” a survival mechanism to warn us of danger in this cursed world. Without pain and suffering, we might be like lepers, unable to recognize that something is terribly wrong and that we need the healing touch of God. As Dr. Brand said, “I cannot think of a greater gift that I could give my leprosy patients than pain.”

Let us not be too quick to remove pain in our lives (whether physical, emotional, social, or spiritual pain). It may be God’s megaphone to get our attention that something is seriously wrong and that we should flee to the One who created us.” (<https://answersingenesis.org/biology/disease/biblical-leprosy-shedding-light-on-the-disease-that-shuns/>)

Similar to Leviticus 14, Leviticus 15 describes in detail the rules and cleansing activities related to “discharges”: *“Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in their uncleanness by their defiling My [j]tabernacle that is among them.” 32 This is the law for the one with a discharge, and for the man [k]who has a seminal emission so that he is unclean by it, 33 and for the woman who is ill because of menstrual impurity, and for the one*

who has a discharge, whether a male or a female, or a man who lies with an unclean woman.” (Leviticus 15:31-33 NASB)

The various commentaries are helpful here as well

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/leviticus/leviticus-15.html>) and (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/leviticus/15.html>)

February 7, 2019 Leviticus 16-18

In Leviticus 10 we read of the “strange fire” offered by Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, and the consequent death of these two by a consuming fire (Leviticus 10:1). Now God speaks to Aaron, and prescribes to him the process by which he, Aaron, is to be cleansed from the sin of his sons and restored to his priestly status. The ritual specified includes sacrificing two goats, one (chosen by casting lots) to be sacrificed and the other to be a sin bearing “scapegoat”. We read: *“The Lord said to Moses:*

“Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the [a]mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the [b]mercy seat. 3 Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a [c]bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his [d]body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his [e]body in water and put them on. 5 He shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. 6 Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household. 7 He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 8 Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the [f]scapegoat. 9 Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the Lord fell, and make it a sin offering. 10 But the goat on which the lot for the [g]scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the [h]scapegoat.” (Leviticus 16:2-10 NASB)

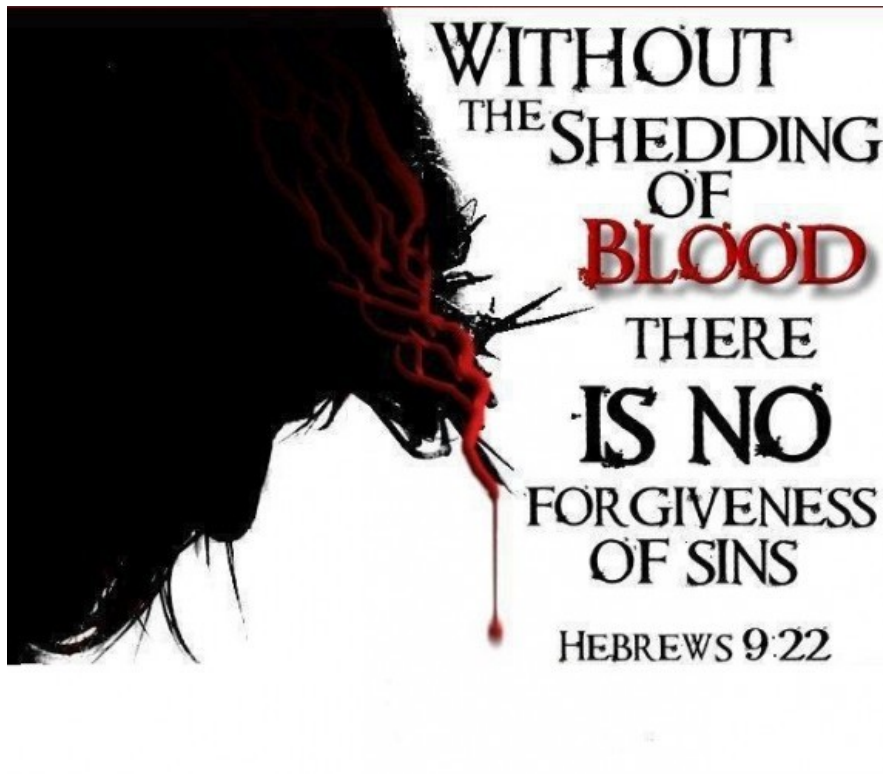
This atonement is specified for Aaron, but applied generally to God’s people: (Leviticus 16 builds upon the preceding chapters by outlining the sacrifices of the great Day of Atonement. This instruction is directed primarily toward Aaron and the priests (vv. 1-25), but not exclusively so, for the people have a role to play as well (cf. vv. 26-31). No other sacrifice in Leviticus more clearly anticipates the future, greater, atonement of Israel’s Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. And no other sacrifice provides a better backdrop against which to see the vast superiority of our Lord’s atonement over that of Aaron. Let us learn well from this chapter.” (<https://bible.org/seriespage/10-day-atonement-leviticus-16>)

The Lord then establishes a permanent observance in the fall of each year as a Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The Bible says: *“This shall be a permanent statute for*

you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; 30 for it is on this day that [s]atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the Lord. 31 It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute. 32 So the priest who is anointed and [t]ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, 33 and make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 34 Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year." And just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so he did." (Leviticus 16:29-34 NASB)

In Leviticus 17 we see a foundational principle about atonement and forgiveness: *"And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. 11 For the [e]life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the [f]life that makes atonement."* (Leviticus 17:10-11 NASB)

Without the shedding of blood there is no atonement. This theme resonates throughout Scripture. We see it again in the Book of Hebrews (Hebrews 9:22). Several references are helpful: "One of the cornerstones of Christian theology is that the only way to achieve atonement for sins is through the offering of a sacrifice whose blood is shed in our place. The Greek Testament makes this very clear in Hebrews 9:22 "...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Is this idea consistent with the teachings of the Tanach, or do the Jewish and Christian bibles diverge on this issue? Christians generally insist that the absolute need for a vicarious blood sacrifice is rooted in the Torah, and cite as proof Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul." (<https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/leviticus-1711/>)



Blood- which was smeared on the lintels of the doorway of God's people to avoid the angel of death- is described as the "life" of the creature: *"For as for the [h]life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its [i]life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the [j]life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.'* 15 *When any person eats an animal which dies or is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean. 16 But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his [k]guilt."*(Leviticus 17:14-16 NASB)

Several authors, including the source just cited, expand and clarify this concept of forgiveness and suggest that it is the prayers and sincere repentance of God's people (and individuals) that is required for atonement and forgiveness. See: (<https://redeeminggod.com/hebrews-9-22-shedding-of-blood-forgiveness-of-sins/>)

Leviticus 17 concludes with a discussion of "blood guiltiness" (Leviticus 17:4): *"For as for the [h]life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its [i]life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the [j]life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.'* 15 *When any person eats an animal which dies or is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean. 16 But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his [k]guilt."* Leviticus 17:14-16 NASB)

The enduring relevance of the Scripture (and its authority) can be seen in many places today, and one of the most striking is the called Special Session of the

General Conference of the United Methodist Church to take place in February 2109.(
<http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session>).

The very core of this conference is the (very often heated) debate as to the foundational authority of the church. The “headline issue” is a debate about human sexuality, but the real issue is authority. One of the key questions that each individual and body of believers must answer is “What is your authority?” The prohibitions in Leviticus 18 against “sex among men” are at the center of the debate (Leviticus 18:22) *“You shall not lie with a male as [l]one lies with a female; it is an abomination.”* The debate is expanded to include all types of homosexual relations, among women as well as men, and the key items of debate swirl around ordination of homosexuals and performance of same sex marriage. The traditional United Methodist position has been that these practices are forbidden and punishable offenses under the Discipline. The Discipline states:

¶ 304.3: The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. View full statement.

¶ 341.6: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

An enormous amount of time and energy has been expended in either attacking (and suggesting modifications to) or defending this traditional principle of the United Methodist Church. The key question seems to be, are we giving Scripture the authority (2 Timothy 3:16-17) or not?

God states that persons who engage in the practices prohibited in Leviticus 18 will be “cut off” from the people: *“For whoever does any of these abominations, [o]those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. 30 Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God.”* (Leviticus 18:29-30 NASB) The prescription of a trial and consequent penalties in the United Methodist Church seems to be consistent with this direction from God:

¶ 2702.

1. A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor,⁹ clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in (¶ 2702.4)¹⁰ with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage;¹¹ (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings,¹² including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies;¹³ (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor;¹⁴ (g) child abuse;¹⁵ (h) sexual abuse;¹⁶ i) sexual misconduct¹⁵ including

the use or possession of pornography, (j) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; (k) racial or gender discrimination; or (l) fiscal malfeasance.

2. A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference, or diaconal minister may be brought to trial when the appropriate body recommends involuntary termination.¹⁷

3. A professing member of a local church may be charged with the following offenses, and, if so, may choose a trial: (a) immorality; (b) crime; (c) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (d) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (e) sexual abuse; (f) sexual misconduct;¹⁸ (g) child abuse; (h) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; (i) racial or gender discrimination; (j) relationships and/or behaviors that undermine the ministry of persons serving within an appointment; or (k) fiscal malfeasance.

We shall soon see what the results of this Special Session are. My hope and fervent prayer is that the Holy Spirit will guide our church to retain the traditional Biblical position and agree on the final and governing authority of the Scriptures!

February 8, 2019 Leviticus 19-21

Leviticus 19 begins with a summarizing statement about holiness- being set aside, dedicated to the Lord. God is different from us- He is the ultimate source and example of holiness, and we are to reflect this holiness as image bearers of God.

The Scripture reads: *"The Lord said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.'"* (Leviticus 19:1-2 NASB).

Following this summarizing statement of principle, specific items are listed. Several key rules are:

1) Leviticus 19:4 – *"Do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God."* A summary of the first commandment. This law was applied to coins later in history- a temple coin could not have the image of a person- such as Caesar- so the money must be "changed";

2) Leviticus 19:14-*"Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord."* Compassion is the basis of all the laws and rules!

3) Leviticus 19:26- *"Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it. "Do not practice divination or seek omens."* A summary of the sacrificial regulations. Saul was to run afoul of the practice of divination as he sought out the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:3-25) We see this prohibition also in Leviticus 19:31, where seeking out a diviner or spiritualist is forbidden: *"Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God."* I can remember telling someone not to use a Ouija board, out of concern for their seeking the "dark side"!

4) Leviticus 19:28- *"Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord."* – The body modification crowd and the thousands of (mostly) young people who eagerly have themselves tattooed should read this!

5) Leviticus 19:25- *'When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'* We are to have compassion on foreigners and treat them well!

Various punishments and consequences for disobedience are specified in Leviticus 20. Among the punishments described is that a person will be “cut off” from the people. This rather puzzling phrase is explored by scholars (<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/1946/what-does-the-old-testament-phrase-cut-off-from-their-people-mean>) and the consensus seems to be that the person is “exiled in place”. It is not clear whether this only applies to the individual or their families as well.

The horrifying practice of child sacrifice- a practice that is purely pagan in origin- is described in Leviticus 20:1-5 “*The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him. 3 I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. 4 If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death, 5 I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molek.’*”

Molek, Molech and Moloch are the various English renditions of a Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice.



18th-century depiction of the Moloch idol (Der Götze Moloch mit 7 Räumen oder Capellen. "The idol Moloch with seven chambers or chapels"), from Johann Lund's Die Alten Jüdischen Heiligthümer (1711, 1738).

The penalty for practicing this despicable practice was death! The question often arises as to why God would order Abraham to sacrifice his child Isaac (Genesis 22:1-12). The scholars have provided some reasonably satisfactory answers (https://www.rationalchristianity.net/abe_isaac.html)

The white hot controversy about homosexual relations is brought into focus with the prohibition in Leviticus 20:13- *"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."*

The rejection of spiritism or mediums is described in Leviticus 20:27- *"A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads."*

The rules, regulations and practices of those in the priesthood are described in detail in Leviticus 21. The requirements for a priest are somewhat similar to those described later in Scripture for an elder or deacon (see: <https://www.gotquestions.org/qualifications-elders-deacons.html>). The priest, according to Leviticus 21:1-4, should not make himself ceremonially "unclean": *"The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, 2 except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, 3 or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband—for her he may make himself unclean. 4 He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage,[a] and so defile himself.'"*

The priest must be sexually pure, and must marry a woman of purity: *"The woman he marries must be a virgin. 14 He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, 15 so that he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the Lord, who makes him holy."* (Leviticus 21:13-15)

God curiously prohibits those with a "defect" from "coming near" or "offering" food to God: *"The Lord said to Moses, 17 'Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. 18 No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; 19 no man with a crippled foot or hand, 20 or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. 21 No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the Lord. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. 22 He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; 23 yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.'* (Leviticus 21:16-23 NASB) This prohibition is explored

in detail in “Understanding Disability in Leviticus 21”
(<https://embodiedtorah.com/2009/12/10/understanding-disability-in-leviticus-21/>)

This very helpful article summarizes the various rabbinic scholars by saying: “This reading of Leviticus 21 is consistent with the “Holiness code” of Leviticus 19, whose message is to see each other as whole sacred human beings. It is consistent with the notion that people with disabilities are not viewed by the Torah as broken or imperfect creatures, but rather as beings charged with living their lives with holiness. May our communities be accessible and inclusive of all people, with and without disabilities; and welcoming of all religious seekers searching for the meaning in Torah.

February 9, 2019 Leviticus 22-23

God clearly understands human nature- after all, He made us in His image! He instructs the priests as to the acceptable means of handling the offerings and sacrifices of the people, knowing that we may be tempted to give less than our best, or give that which costs us little or nothing. God is teaching us that only our best is acceptable: *“The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will not profane my holy name. I am the Lord.”* (Leviticus 22:1-2 NIV)

Since God shows how much we need direction as to specifics, He instructs Moses about the conduct of the priests: *“The priests are to perform my service in such a way that they do not become guilty and die for treating it with contempt. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.”* (Leviticus 22:9 NIV)

Specified parts of the offerings themselves can be eaten, mostly by the priests and selected others, but not by “laymen”. This prescription (Leviticus 22:15) was a source of controversy later in the ministry of Jesus, when Jesus referred to David eating the “showbread” (1 Samuel 21:6) when the teachers of the Law objected to Jesus’ disciples gathering grain and eating it on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28 ESV):

“One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Jesus is teaching that the Sabbath- and its observances- are a gift- not an endless series of rules and “hoops to jump through”. God gave us the Sabbath out of His love for us!

The offering itself should be without defect (Leviticus 22:17-25 NASB) *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁸ “Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘Any man of the house of Israel or of the aliens in*

Israel who presents his offering, whether it is any of their ⁽⁶⁾votive or any of their freewill offerings, which they present to the LORD for a burnt offering— ¹⁹ for you to be accepted—it must be a male without defect from the cattle, the sheep, or the goats. ²⁰ Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you. ²¹ When a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to ⁽⁶⁾fulfill a special vow or for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. ²² Those that are blind or fractured or maimed or having a running sore or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the LORD, nor make of them an offering by fire on the altar to the LORD. ²³ In respect to an ox or a lamb which has an ⁽⁶⁾overgrown or stunted member, you may present it for a freewill offering, but for a vow it will not be accepted. ²⁴ Also anything with its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the LORD, or ⁽⁶⁾sacrifice in your land, ²⁵ nor shall you accept any such from the hand of a foreigner for offering as the ⁽⁶⁾food of your God; for their corruption is in them, they have a defect, they shall not be accepted for you.'

God summarizes His regulations and specifications for sacrifices at the end of this chapter (Leviticus 22: 32-33 NASB): *"You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the Lord who sanctifies you, 33 who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the Lord."*

Leviticus 23 is a set of regulations as to the times the special days of offering and rest- the "special sabbaths" are to be offered and celebrated. One interesting rule came to be part of a beautiful story later- the harvest is not to be gathered from the whole field- the "edges" are to be left unharvested so the poor can "glean" from them. The story of Ruth shows clearly how this kindness to the poor was a key to Ruth's survival (Leviticus 23:22 NASB): *'When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the Lord your God.'*"



Ruth Meets Boaz While Gleaning in the Fields

Right Rev. Richard Gilmour, D.D. Bible History: Containing the Most Remarkable Events of the Old and New Testaments, with a Compendium of Church History (New York, NEW YORK (NY): Benziger Brothers, 1904) 66

The Festival of Booths is described in Leviticus 23: *"On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord for seven days, with a [g]rest on the first day and a [h]rest on the eighth day. 40 Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the [i]foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41 You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall [j]live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall [k]live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."* 44 So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the Lord." (Leviticus 23:39-44 NASB)

The Hebrew word for this festival is "Sukkot" meaning "Festival of Tabernacles". It was a reminder to the people of God's deliverance from the Egyptians and their total dependence on God for their lives and blessings. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkot>

February 10, 2019 Leviticus 24-25

Leviticus 24 first describes the requirements and specifications for the "showbread" and the oil to be placed near the altar. Again, the principle is that only the finest be used to prepare for a sacrifice to the Lord: *"The Lord said to Moses, 2 "Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. 3 Outside the curtain that shields the ark of the covenant law in the tent of meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the Lord from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. 4 The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the Lord must be tended continually.*

5 "Take the finest flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah[a] for each loaf. 6 Arrange them in two stacks, six in each stack, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. 7 By each stack put some pure incense as a memorial[b] portion to represent the bread and to be a food offering presented to the Lord. 8 This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. 9 It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in the sanctuary area, because it is a most holy part of their perpetual share of the food offerings presented to the Lord." (Leviticus 24:1-9 NIV)

God repeatedly commanded that His Name be taken seriously, that he is holy and should be approached with awe, reverence and respect. This is, of course, a consequence of the first commandment, in which God sets the state for the rest of

the commandments by insisting the He be the only object of worship. The uncreated is to be worshipped, and nothing else. A blasphemer, who blasphemed the Name “with a curse” was brought before the people, who asked God to give them guidance and wisdom as to this offense and its rightful punishment. The result was that not only was the blasphemer punished by death by stoning, but the general prohibition against murder was further explained by God Himself: *“Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. 11 The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother’s name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) 12 They put him in custody until the will of the Lord should be made clear to them. 13 Then the Lord said to Moses: 14 “Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. 15 Say to the Israelites: ‘Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible; 16 anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death. 17 ““Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. 18 Anyone who takes the life of someone’s animal must make restitution—life for life. 19 Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. 21 Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death. 22 You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the Lord your God.” 23 Then Moses spoke to the Israelites, and they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him. The Israelites did as the Lord commanded Moses.”* (Leviticus 24:10-23 NIV)

One might wonder if the detail as to the parentage of this person as “the son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father” (Leviticus 24:10) was simply a historical or genealogic detail or perhaps suggested that intermarriage might be likely to produce unacceptable (even ungodly) behavior.

The Sabbath Year (Leviticus 25:1-7) is to be treated as a sabbath of each week- no crops were to be planted or harvested. God Himself would provide all that was needed that year: *“The Lord then spoke to Moses [a]at Mount Sinai, saying, 2 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord. 3 Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. 5 Your harvest’s [b]aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. 6 All of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. 7 Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat.”* (Leviticus 25:1-7 NASB)

Furthermore, each 49 years (seven sevens) is to be a 50th year, the Year of Jubilee. The Bible Study Tools reference is very helpful here:” The crowning feature, though, was the full restitution of all real property in the Jubilee Year. The primary object of this regulation was, of course, the reversion of all hereditary property to the family which originally possessed it, and the reestablishment of the original arrangement regarding the division of the land. But that was not all; for this legal disposition and regulation of external matters was closely connected with the high calling of the Jewish people. It was a part of the Divine plan looking forward to the salvation of mankind. "The deepest meaning of it (the Jubilee Year) is to be found in the “apokatastasis tes basileias tou theou”, i.e. in the restoring of all that which in the course of time was perverted by man's sin, in the removing of all slavery of sin, in the establishing of the true liberty of the children of God, and in the delivering of the creation from the bondage of corruption to which it was subjected on account of man's depravity" (Romans 8:19) (compare Keil, Manual of Biblical Archaeology). In the Year of Jubilee a great future era of Yahweh's favor is foreshadowed, that period which, according to Isaiah 61:1-3, shall be ushered in to all those that labor and are heavy laden, by Him who was anointed by the spirit of the Lord Yahweh.”

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/jubilee-year/>)

God was to provide more for each sixth year than before, so that His people could learn to trust His provision for them: *“But if you say, “What are we going to eat on the seventh year [i]f we do not sow or gather in our crops?” 21 then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. 22 When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in.”* (Leviticus 25:20-22 NASB)

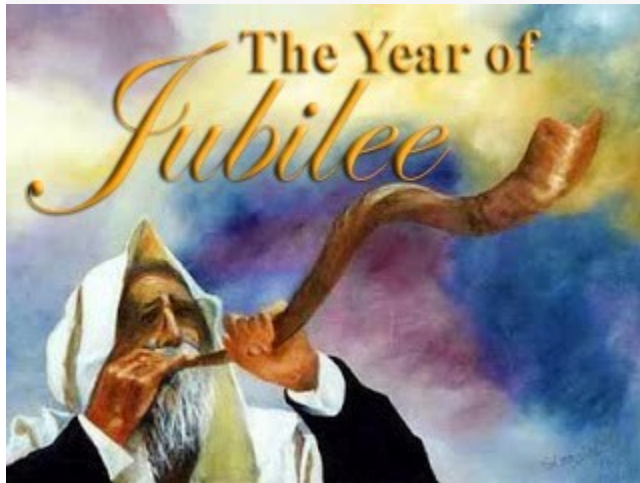
We also see the prohibition against charging interest among God’s people, even to those who out of their poverty need to borrow funds: *‘Now in case a [v]countryman of yours becomes poor and his [w]means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. 36 Do not take [x]usurious interest from him, but revere your God, that your [y]countryman may live with you. 37 You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain. 38 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.’* (Leviticus 25:35-38 NASB) The ESV translation makes the prohibition against the practice of charging interest even clearer: *“If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit.”*

Historically, the practice of usury, or charging interest, was sometimes interpreted by God’s people as a “permission” to charge interest to non-Jews. Alternatively, the Christian community, in adherence to the OT prohibitions, avoided the practice of usury and left a cultural “vacuum” which was filled with the Jews. Whichever interpretation is correct, and both may be partly correct, it is clear that this practice does violence to God’s apparent intent for His people to be compassionate and

caring. See (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_antisemitism) and also (<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/usury-and-moneylending-in-judaism/>)

Wikipedia states: “One of the reasons that moneylending was open to Jews as a profession was that European Christian culture regarded moneylending as sinful or immoral. That caused Christians to avoid the profession, leaving a vacuum for which Jews could fill. The Christian abhorrence of moneylending was rooted in the Old Testament laws of Exodus 22:25, Deuteronomy 23:19-20, Leviticus 25:35-37 and Psalms 15:5.”

Those persons so poor that they needed to “sell themselves” into slavery were to be redeemed “bought back” by God during the Year of Jubilee. Again, the overarching theme is compassion and kindness: *‘Now if the [ac]means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a [ad]countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger’s family, 48 then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, 49 or his uncle, or his uncle’s son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or [ae]if he prospers, he may redeem himself. 50 He then with his purchaser shall calculate from the year when he sold himself to him up to the year of jubilee; and the price of his sale shall correspond to the number of years. It is like the days of a hired man that he shall be with him. 51 If there are still many years, he shall refund part of his purchase price in proportion to them for his own redemption; 52 and if few years remain until the year of jubilee, he shall so calculate with him. In proportion to his years he is to refund the amount for his redemption. 53 Like a man hired year by year he shall be with him; he shall not rule over him with severity in your sight. 54 Even if he is not redeemed by [af]these means, he shall still go out in the year of jubilee, he and his sons with him. 55 For the sons of Israel are My servants; they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’* (Leviticus 25:47-55 NASB). We are to redeem because God, who is our Lord, redeems us!



February 11, 2019 Leviticus 26-27

Reward and punishment for following or failing to follow the Law is the subject addressed in Leviticus 26. The rewards are summarized briefly: *"If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, 4 then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. 5 Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your [c]food to the full and live securely in your land. 6 I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land. 7 But you will chase your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword; 8 five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword. 9 So I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm My covenant with you. 10 You will eat the old supply and clear out the old because of the new. 11 Moreover, I will make My [d]dwelling among you, and My soul will not [e]reject you. 12 I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. 13 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect."* Leviticus 26:3-13 NASB) Notice the conditional blessing- if the people are obedient, then they will be blessed. Blessing is deeply and irreversible connected with obedience!

But if you do not...then punishment will be the result. A series of graded punishments of the people is listed, almost if God is anticipating the continued stubborn disobedience of His people: *"But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, 15 if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, 16 I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. 17 I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. 18 If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. 19 I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. 20 Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit."* (Leviticus 26: 14-20 NASB)

Continued disobedience in the face of punishment is even worse: *'If then, you [f]act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins. 22 I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted. 23 'And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, 24 then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. 25 I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands. 26 When I break your staff of bread, ten*

women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread [g]in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied.” (Leviticus 26:21-26 NASB)

There is, however, hope. The purpose of these punishments-or withdrawal of blessing- is to demonstrate in vivid ways the complete dependence on God for blessing and abundance. God is teaching His people that sin does matter- that it is serious and has serious consequences. The restoration of those who repent (turn away) from their sins is also clearly stated: ‘If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me— 41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. 43 For the land will be abandoned by them, and will make up for its sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. They, meanwhile, will be making amends for their iniquity, [o]because they rejected My ordinances and their soul abhorred My statutes. 44 Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. 45 But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord.’ (Leviticus 26:40-45 NASB)

Several references are helpful here (<https://bible.org/seriespage/21-welcome-warning-leviticus-26>) and (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/leviticus-26/>) Several scholars have suggested that Leviticus 26 is a picture of Israel’s entire history- obedience, followed by prosperity, followed by forgetting or ignoring God, then punishment, followed by repentance- and the cycle repeats!

Leviticus concludes with “valuations” regulations about the value of property, the requirements for offerings and things “set aside” or dedicated to the Lord.

Apparently a “difficult vow” is valued by the standing and gender of the person making the vow: *“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to the Lord. 3 If your valuation is of the male from twenty years even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. 4 Or if it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels. 5 If it be from five years even to twenty years old then your valuation for the male shall be twenty shekels and for the female ten shekels. 6 But if they are from a month even up to five years old, then your valuation shall be five shekels of silver for the male, and for the female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver. 7 If they are from sixty years old and upward, if it is a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels. 8 But if he is poorer than your valuation, then he shall be placed before the priest and the priest shall value him; according to*

[a]the means of the one who vowed, the priest shall value him.” (Leviticus 27 2-8 NASB)

The difficult vow was apparently a promise made to God (see <http://www.calvaryfullerton.org/Bstudy/03%20Lev/1997/03Lev27.htm>). Such a vow might have been like the vow made by Jephthah – (Judges 11:1-11, 29-33). “Jephthah was a man of outstanding military ability who rose from despised beginnings (he was illegitimate) to become a leader of Israel. In the heat of battle he promised God that if he was victorious he would offer as sacrifice the first thing that met him when he returned home from the battle. (<http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/jephtahs-daughter/>) This vow- or promise in a “bargain” with God, cost Jephthah his daughter!

The firstborn animal automatically belongs to the Lord: *“However, a firstborn among animals, which as a firstborn belongs to the Lord, no man may consecrate it; whether ox or sheep, it is the Lord’s. 27 But if it is among the unclean animals, then he shall [o]redeem it according to your valuation and add to it one-fifth of it; and if it is not redeemed, then it shall be sold according to your valuation.” (Leviticus 27:26-27 NASB)*

The tithe is sacred and belongs to the Lord alone: *‘Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord. 31 If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. 32 For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. 33 He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed.’” (Leviticus 27:30-33 NASB)*

God then concludes His instructions to Moses: *“These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai.” (Leviticus 27:34 NASB)*

February 12, 2019 Numbers 1-2

Inventory? Why would God order Moses to take inventory of all the tribes? Why were only the men counted? The commentary is very helpful here, since the entire book of Numbers seems to be a recitation of history rather than a story of God’s dealing with His people.

The commentary is illuminating here: (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/numbers-1/>)

NUMBERS 1 – THE CENSUS OF ISRAEL

A. Background to the Book of Numbers.

1. As recorded in the Book of Exodus, Israel escaped slavery in Egypt – God miraculously set them free from hundreds of years of bondage. They came through the Red Sea and saw God provide through the desert wilderness. They came to Mount Sinai where God appeared to them in a spectacular way; where Moses went

up on the mountain to meet with God and receive the law. At Mount Sinai Israel also embraced an idolatrous image of a golden calf and was corrected by the LORD.

a. Encamped at Mount Sinai, Israel built a tabernacle of meeting and established a priesthood, receiving God's plan for the priests and the nation at large in Leviticus. At the end of the Book of Leviticus, they have been out of Egypt for a little more than a year.

b. Exodus covered a year; Leviticus only a month – but the Book of Numbers encompasses more than 38 years.

2. This third book of Moses tells us what happened during those 38 years. The Hebrew title of this book gives us an idea of the theme of Numbers. In Hebrew this book is titled In the Wilderness instead of Numbers.

a. The wilderness was never meant to be Israel's destination. God's intention was to bring them into the Promised Land of Canaan. The wilderness was intended as a temporary place – a place to move through, not to live in.

i. "The Hebrew word for wilderness (midbar) means a place for driving flocks. It is not a completely arid desert, but contains little vegetation and a few trees. The rainfall in such areas is too light, a few inches per year, to support cultivation." (Wenham)

b. The Book of Numbers is all about God's people in the wilderness – how they get there, how God deals with them in the wilderness, and how He brings them out of the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land.

i. "The theme of the book of Numbers is the journey to the Promised Land of Canaan. Its opening ten chapters, covering a mere fifty days, describe how Moses organized Israel for the march from Sinai to the Promised Land." (Wenham)

c. The Book of Numbers gives us a big vision: Where is God taking us? What will it take to get there? What inward qualities must God develop in us and demand in us along the way?

i. Promised Land people are very different from slave people. Israel emerged from Egypt a slave people, basically unsuited for the Promised Land. How would God transform them into a promised-land people?

ii. "So the Israelites had been slaves in the land of Goshen; their tasks were appointed, and their taskmasters compelled their obedience. Their difficulties had been great, their bondage cruel, but they were free from the necessity of thought and arrangement. Having escaped from their taskmaster, they imagined that freedom meant escape from rule. They had been taught in their year of encampment under the shadow of the mountain that they had to submit to law, and it was irksome to them, and they became discontented. This discontent resulted from lack of perfect confidence in God." (Morgan)

d. **The Book of Numbers approaches it all God's way.** When we are in the wilderness, we are tempted to launch a hundred different schemes and plans to escape. But only God's way really works; and the Book of Numbers gives us God's way. The idea that the LORD spoke to Moses is repeated more than 150 times and more than 20 different ways in Numbers.

Only the fighting age men were counted: *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 2 'Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head 3 from twenty years old and upward, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their armies.'*" (Numbers 1:1-3 NASB)

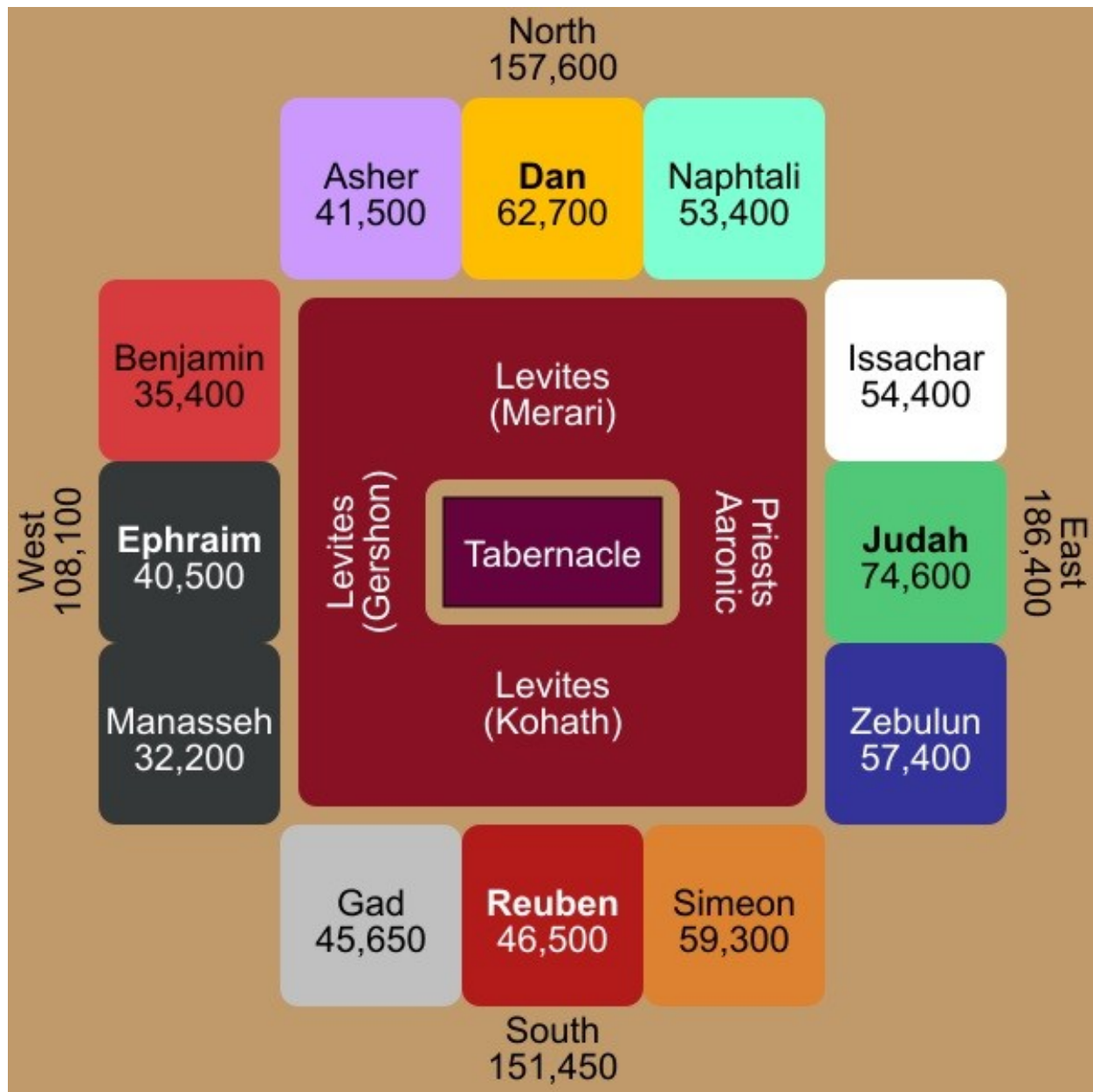
If all the numbers counted in each tribe are summed, we can estimate the number of persons led by Moses in the wilderness, accounting for the fact that the tribe of Levi was not counted in this census (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Israelites-exodus.html>) Most estimates place the total number at about 2.4 million!

Even though the tribe of Levi is excluded because of their priestly duties instead of serving in military duties, there are still twelve tribes counted since Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manassah, are counted. The Levites were to guard the tabernacle: *"But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there will be no wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony."* (Numbers 1:53 NASB)

Once again we see the these of obedience- whatever God ordered the people to do, they did: "Thus the sons of Israel did; according to all which the Lord had commanded Moses, so they did." (Numbers 1:54)

Numbers 2 describes the geography of the encampment- all around the tent of meeting. Each time the people were to move- on God's orders, they struck their dwellings/tents and moved and then encamped in the new location in the same way. Order was critical for this many people- for a number of practical reasons. The arrangement around the Tent of meeting/tabernacle was an illustration of the preciousness of this place of worship and encounter with the living God. Again, the commentary is very helpful

(<https://biblicalscholarship.wordpress.com/2016/11/06/commentary-on-numbers-2/>) : "The tent of meeting is at the center of a rectangular camp. Joshua 3:4 says a distance of 2,000 cubits (900 meters or 1,000 yards) should separate the ark from the non-Levitical tribes. The rabbis (Numbers Rabba 2:1) surmised this was the distance because it was the farthest walking distance permitted on the Sabbath, so all Israel could worship at the sanctuary."



Numbers 2 ends with a summary: *“These are the numbered men of the sons of Israel by their fathers’ households; the total of the numbered men of the camps by their armies, 603,550. 33 The Levites, however, were not numbered among the sons of Israel, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 34 Thus the sons of Israel did; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, every one by his family according to his father’s household.”* (Numbers 2:32-34 NASB)

February 13, 2019 Numbers 3-4

"The firstborn belong to the Lord"...a principle we see again and again in Scripture. The men of the Levites of fighting age were then numbered, as well as the firstborn among all the tribes. The Levites numbered 22,000 and the firstborn of all the other tribes combined numbered 22,273. The "extra" 273 were to be redeemed (bought back) by a specified sacrifice. We read: *"Now those who were to camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, are Moses and Aaron and his sons, performing the duties of the sanctuary for the obligation of the sons of Israel; but the layman coming near was to be put to death. All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the command of the Lord by their families, every male from a month old and upward, were 22,000.*

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Number every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names. You shall take the Levites for Me, I am the Lord, instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the sons of Israel." So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, just as the Lord had commanded him; and all the firstborn males by the number of names from a month old and upward, for their numbered men were 22,273.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel and the cattle of the Levites. And the Levites shall be Mine; I am the Lord. For the ransom of the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites, you shall take five shekels apiece, per head; you shall take them in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), and give the money, the ransom of those who are in excess among them, to Aaron and to his sons." So Moses took the ransom money from those who were in excess, beyond those ransomed by the Levites; from the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, 1,365. 51 Then Moses gave the ransom money to Aaron and to his sons, at the command of the Lord, just as the Lord had commanded Moses." (Numbers 3:38-51 NASB)

Each shekel has been estimated to be worth about \$600 based on today's gold value (<https://www.gotquestions.org/sanctuary-shekel.html>) , so the ransom for each "extra" firstborn was about \$3000, and all 273 would have been ransomed for about \$820,000 in today's monetary values! The point is, that all the firstborn belong to the Lord, and that by redeeming them, the Levites were provided with funds- a living wage. This was important since they were not deeded land but were uniquely called to serve.

Numbers 4 enumerates the duties of the three major subgroups of the Levites- the Gershonites, Kohahites and Merarites. The object here is that order and clear division of duties would be performed by these men eligible to serve; their number was 8,580: *"All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' households, from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who could enter to do the work of service and the work of carrying in the tent of meeting. Their numbered men were 8,580. According to the [ab]commandment of the Lord [ac]through Moses, they were numbered, everyone by his serving or carrying; thus these were*

his numbered men, just as the Lord had commanded Moses." (Numbers 4:46-49 NASB) Once again, the commentary is helpful (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/numbers/numbers-4.html>)



From <https://freedailybiblestudy.com/april-27th-bible-meditation-for-numbers-4/>

February 14, 2019 Numbers 5-6

Leprosy was- and is- a dreadful scourge on mankind. We now know this debilitating disease as Hansen's disease (<https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/index.html>) and it is contagious but not nearly as contagious as thought in ancient times. An afflicted person was required to stay a distance from the camp, and touching an infected person caused the one touching to become unclean. Later Jesus displayed His knowledge, and courage, by both touching and healing several lepers (Matthew 8, Luke 17). God's command was given primarily to protect the people and prevent its spread: *"Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. 3 You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst." 4 The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the Lord had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did.*" (Numbers 5:2-4 NASB)

Sins must be atoned for, and restitution made- either to the offended party or to a priest: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the Lord, and that person is guilty, 7 then [a]he shall confess [b]his sins which [c]he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged. 8 But if the man has no [d]relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong must go to the Lord for the priest, besides the ram of atonement, by which

atonement is made for him. 9 Also every [e]contribution pertaining to all the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they offer to the priest, shall be his. 10 So every man's holy gifts shall be his; whatever any man gives to the priest, it becomes his." Numbers 5:5-10 NASB)

In this primarily patriarchal society, a "straying woman"- who was under the authority of her husband- must be put to the test and judged, even though the husband was exempt from judgment: *"This is the law of jealousy: when a wife, being under the authority of her husband, goes astray and defiles herself, 30 or when a spirit of jealousy comes over a man and he is jealous of his wife, he shall then make the woman stand before the Lord, and the priest shall apply all this law to her. 31 Moreover, the man will be free from guilt, but that woman shall bear her guilt."* (Numbers 5:29-31 NASB) The Enduring Word commentary helps in understanding the sins and consequences described here (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/numbers-5/>).

Occasionally one might dedicate themselves to be set apart for meditation, prayer, or to serve the lord in some special way. One way of doing this was to take the vows of the Nazarite. The length of time of this set apart service was contained in the vow that the person took (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazirite>) The two most well know Nazarites in the Bible were Samuel and Sampson: *"Two examples of Nazirites in the Hebrew Bible are Samson (Judges 13:5), and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11). Both were born of previously barren mothers and entered into their vows through their mothers' oaths rather than their own volition: In the first case, God sent an angel to make the vow known to the mother for her not-yet-conceived son, Samson, of what He wanted the child to be like in his life "And the woman came and said to her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of an angel of God, very awesome; and I did not ask him from where he was and his name he did not tell me. And he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; and now do not drink wine and strong drink, and do not eat any unclean (thing), for a Nazirite to God shall the lad be, from the womb until the day of his death.'* (Judges 13:2-7)

In the second case, the mother (Hannah) made the vow before Samuel was even conceived, because she was barren. (1 Samuel 1:11) These vows required Samson and Samuel to live devout lives, yet in return they received extraordinary gifts: Samson possessed strength and ability in physical battle against the Philistines, while Samuel became a prophet.



Samson and Delilah, by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641)

Aaron then gives a beautiful benediction and blessing- remembered among many United Methodists as the benediction at the end of a meeting of the United Methodist Youth Fellowship: *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'*

So they shall [I]invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them."
(Numbers 6:22-27 NASB)